

STORIES FROM  
DANTE

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SUSAN CUNNINGTON

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Stories from Dante.

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STORIES  
FROM  
DANTE







*Fr.*

BEATRICE

*Dante Gabriel Rossetti*

# STORIES FROM DANTE

BY

SUSAN CUNNINGTON

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WITH ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOUR BY

EVELYN PAUL



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# Stories from Dante

## Introduction I

### THE CITY AND THE POET

“ Florence, the most famous and most beauteous daughter of Rome.”

DANTE.

“ O foster-nurse of man’s abandoned glory,

Since Athens, its great mother, sunk in splendour ;

Thou shadowest forth that mighty shape in story,

As ocean its wrecked fanes, severe yet tender :

The light-invested angel Poesy

Was drawn from the dim world to welcome thee.”

SHELLEY.

**F**LORENCE, on the river Arno, which has been noted for centuries as one of the most beautiful cities in the world, had, when our story begins, but few of the churches, palaces, and public buildings, decorated with sculpture and frescoes, which were afterwards to make her famous. Her citizens, however, were proud of their town and were continually rebuilding it and extending their borders as their wealth and numbers increased. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries they began to employ the wandering, or “ Free ” masons, and the sculptors and painters, who, travelling over Europe, erected cathedrals, churches, and stately palaces, as they went.

Like most mediæval towns, the city of Florence had walls and gates, the different parts of the town being called after these main entrances, as—Seste di Porti San Piero, Seste di Porti San Pancranzio, and so on. It possessed one of the few striking clocks at that time in Europe, and, from the tower in the middle of the city, the bell sounding the hours might be heard throughout Florence. Instead of the many bridges that now span the river, there were then only two—the “old bridge,” Ponte Vecchio, and the Ponte Rubaconte. Upon a buttress of the former stood a huge statue of the god Mars, in heathen days the patron of the city.

The streets were narrow, with high over-hanging houses, so that only strips of bright blue sky could be seen from the rough pavement. Even then, Florence was known as a “City of towers,” the nobles’ houses being built more like fortresses than palaces. This was not surprising in a warlike age when all disputes, whether between private persons, towns, or nations, were wont to be settled by fighting. The great scholar-statesman, Machiavelli, writes of them, “In Florence at first the nobles were divided against each other, then the people against the nobles, and, lastly, the people against the populace; and it oft-times happened that when one of the parties got the upper hand, it split into two.”

At the beginning of the thirteenth century the great struggle of the people against the nobles was nearly ended, and the burghers were strong enough to compel every noble to become a member of one of the Greater Guilds, before he could build, or occupy, a house within the city walls. These Guilds were the money-changers, the wool-merchants, the silk-merchants, the physicians and apothecaries, the furriers, the judges, and the notaries. Thus it came about that so late as the glorious



days of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the proudest rulers of Florence bore the distinctive surname, de Medici, "of the physicians." In the year 1216 the supremacy of the burghers over the nobles had been followed by the split mentioned by the old writer.

For the heir to one of the noble houses of Florence, who was about to marry the daughter of another, transferred his allegiance to a different lady and married her. This was bitterly resented by the insulted family, and all the aristocracy of Florence took one side or the other, until the personal quarrel had made a great party division between them. The family of the injured lady and her supporters allied themselves with the great political party of the Guelfs, as they were called, who, in many of the Italian cities, were struggling to establish the power of the Pope as temporal ruler. Their opponents joined the other great political party, the Ghibellines, who were planning to bring all Italy under the dominion of the Emperor of Germany. So that Florence, which had hitherto been a city of united Guelf sympathies, became bitterly divided.

The ill-feeling was deepened, some years later, by another personal quarrel. The descendants of a famous house of Pistoja had divided themselves into two rival factions, through alliances made with other great families, one branch calling themselves Bianchi, after the name, Bianca, of the bride, and the other taking the opposed title of Neri. Thus the "Whites" and the "Blacks" were continually at strife with each other, and their kinsmen and friends took sides in the quarrel. It became still further embittered when a son of the Bianchi family received a wound from a young member of the Neri in a duel. The father of the latter, thinking to pacify the injured youth's people, sent his son to

apologise. But those were rough times, and, instead of receiving the apology, the father chopped off the offender's right hand with a hatchet, warning him that such insults were not wiped away with words.

Henceforth the city nobles were divided between Bianchi and Neri, and, though both had originally been Guelfs, the one now became Ghibelline, and the bitterness of private resentment strengthened the ill-feeling between the political parties. The government of Florence, consisting of a mayor, or *podestà*, and a council of magistrates, was alternately Guelf and Ghibelline, each party banishing the other and being banished in turn. Much of the business of making laws, regulating trade, and redressing grievances was carried on in the great central square, surrounded by the tall houses of the chief families of the city; for then, as in the present day, the people of continental towns lived much in the open air, instead of, like the English, indoors. All over Europe the Florentines were noted for their good wares, and especially for the purity of their gold and silver. The large gold coin, worth about eight shillings, was named "florin" after the town, which was called Florence, it is supposed, on account of the great fields of iris, or lilies, which decked the plain beneath Fiesole. The three golden balls, now so well known as the sign of lenders of money upon pledges, were the arms of the Lamperti family, first famous as dealers in precious stones and bullion. The city arms were, until the middle of the thirteenth century, white lilies on a red field; but, in the great strife of political parties, the Guelfs adopted a red lily on a white ground, whilst the Ghibellines kept the ancient standard.

To the happy times before this division the patriots of Florence looked back as to a golden age, seeing



DANTE IN THE STREETS OF FLORENCE



" Florence in such assured tranquillity,  
She had no cause at which to grieve . . . ne'er  
The lily from the lance had hung reverse,  
Or through division been with vermeil dyed."

Thus Dante, one of the noblest and the greatest of the famous sons of Florence, commemorates those past glories. The supposed speaker is one of his ancestors, a Florentine of note in the eleventh century. In the year 1265 a certain Aldighiero Alighieri, a member of the Notaries' Guild and a supporter of the Guelf party, with his wife Bella, lived in one of the high old houses overlooking the market square. To them was born a little son, about whom his mother had dreamed a strange dream, in which she had seen him able to do wonderful things. This assured them that there would be a great future before the infant, and they agreed to name him accordingly. So in the solemn Baptistery of San Giovanni he was christened Durante, "he that endures"; but ere long this was shortened by his parents to Dante, "the giver," and has so come down to us.

We may picture young Dante in the narrow, ill-paved streets of old Florence, watching the busy scenes of buying and selling, the bargaining and weighing at the tables of the bullion-dealers, or standing on the Ponte Vecchio watching the swiftly-flowing Arno beneath him. There would be much that was interesting and exciting to see in that busy city. Mountebanks and jongleurs, parties of pilgrims, glittering bands of horsemen, religious processions; and, on fête-days, sports and games and daring exercises by which the Florentines loved to keep alive the hardy contests of their Roman ancestors. On the feast of St John Baptist, June 24th, horse and foot races, wrestling, quoit-throwing, and other



feats of strength and skill were carried on throughout the long summer's day.

For play-fellows and companions Dante Alighieri had the sons and daughters of the neighbours in the high old houses, for the Florentines were sociable people within the limits of their political divisions. We find recorded the impression made upon the boy on the occasion of some festivity at the house of the Portinari, when he was only eight years old, an occasion which made one of the great landmarks of his life. Amongst the children of the assembled guests was a little girl of about his own age, named Beatrice, which was often shortened into the caressing Bice ;<sup>1</sup> gay and beautiful in appearance, and gentle and agreeable in manner ; indeed, her features were so delicate and beautifully formed that many thought her almost an angel. Dante himself records that, " She seemed not to be the daughter of a mortal man, but of God," as Homer sang of Helen. He tells us that he treasured the memory of her grace and beauty, and sought opportunity to see her, if only from afar. But their lives lay apart, so that it was many years before Dante had again the happiness to be near her. His mother had died whilst he was still a baby, and his grave young father was much taken up with the affairs of the city, so that the little boy in the quiet house found amusements very different from those of a crowded nursery. We can fancy him listening to the earnest political discussions of his elders, understanding a remark here and there, and becoming familiar with the names of persons and places and events ; soon, even, with true Florentine fervour, taking sides in his own mind with one or the other.

<sup>1</sup> In Italian the *c* has a sound rather like our *ch* in "church." Hence *Beatrice* is a word of four syllables, *Beatrichè*, and *Bice* is *Bechè*.



In due time he went to school and studied the difficult subjects then taught to boys. Books and parchment were scarce and very dear, so that reading went on from a few treasured volumes, which we should now think too hard for young pupils; and sand-trays and slate-tablets were used for practising writing, geometry and arithmetic. Dante loved learning, and seemed to be able to remember what he read or was told; he delighted in the history of his own city and the great names connected with it. The literatures of Greece and Rome were studied, and almost all serious writing was in Latin. Dante's native tongue, the Tuscan dialect, like English before Chaucer, was believed to be not dignified enough for literature. A few poets, however, thought differently, and composed their verses in the popular tongue; so that when Dante grew to be a young man it had become fashionable for educated gentlemen to practise writing poetry.

In earlier times the subjects for poems had been adventures and brave deeds, but in the thirteenth century the Troubadours, as they were called, wrote upon Love, generally dedicating their verses to some beautiful woman. It was natural, therefore, that the reverent admiration of a young Florentine of Dante's age, for a maiden whom he loved, should inspire his song. So that when Dante was eighteen years old, and he again met the beautiful Bice of his boyish devotion, instead of seeking perilous adventures in her honour, as one of his ancestors might have done, he sought to express his adoration in a series of poems. He tells of this second meeting, and its effect upon his imagination: "When so many days had passed that nine years exactly were fulfilled, this wonderful creature appeared to me in white robes between two gentle ladies who

were older than she; and passing by the street, she turned her eyes towards that place, where I stood very timidly, and in her ineffable courtesy saluted me so graciously that I seemed then to see the heights of all blessedness."

The story of how he carried out his resolve to compose some worthy verses in her honour, and how there came to be written one of the most wonderful poems in the world, will be told in our next chapter. He became known as one of a band of young poets who delighted in experiments in verse-making, much as Sir Philip Sidney and others of Spenser's friends delighted in them in England three hundred years later; and their *Canzone*, or songs, became admired and popular. How jealously Dante cared for his work is shown by a story told of him in those days.<sup>1</sup> "One day Dante, passing by the Porta San Pietro, heard a blacksmith beating iron upon the anvil, and singing some of his verses, jumbling the lines together, mutilating and confusing them, so that it seemed to Dante that he was receiving a great injury. He said nothing, but going into the blacksmith's shop, where there were many articles made in iron, he took up his hammer and pincers and scales, and many other things, and threw them out into the road. The blacksmith, turning round upon him, cried out, 'What are you doing? are you mad?'

" 'What are *you* doing?' said Dante.

" 'I am working at my proper business,' said the blacksmith, 'and you are spoiling my work by throwing it into the road.'

" Said Dante, 'If you do not like me to spoil your things, do not spoil mine.'

" 'What things of yours am I spoiling?' said the man

<sup>1</sup> SISMONDI.

"And Dante replied, 'You are singing something of mine, but not as I made it. I have no other trade but this, and you spoil my work.'

"The blacksmith gathered up his things and went on with his hammering, but when he sang again, sang of Tristram and Lancelot, and left Dante alone."

A rude interruption came to Dante, amidst his beloved studies and writing of poetry, when a war broke out between Florence and Pisa, a city which had for long been a rival. We read that the young poet was one of the first volunteers for a cavalry regiment of Florentines, and fought bravely in the battle. Florence was victorious, and became the leading Italian city, though it is said that, "the arrogance of her people was such that those of other towns loved her more in discord than in peace, and obeyed her more from fear than for love." In a letter written to a friend some time afterwards Dante refers to his warlike experiences in the spirit of sincerity and simplicity which marks all that he says: "I had much dread and, at the end, the greatest gladness, by reason of the varying chances of the battle."

The year after the war ended, the beautiful Beatrice died, and, though her marriage had removed her from Dante's circle of friends, she had remained his "ideal lady," and his devotion was now sorrowful and heart-broken. In the busy years which followed, when Dante became more and more engrossed with politics and, like a good Florentine, gave himself up to his duties as a citizen, he never forgot his early inspiration, but cherished the resolve to write some great work to commemorate the beautiful Beatrice. Presently he was elected prior, or magistrate, of the Apothecaries' Guild, to which he belonged. Thus he spent much time in the

public square or the council-chamber, arranging leagues and treaties with other towns, settling quarrels and grievances of the citizens, planning the making of bridges and conduits, building churches and halls for the improvement of the city, and helping in the encouragement and protection of artists and scholars. Then he married, and brought home his bride to one of the old houses of the Alighieri in the ancient market square ; and, while his sons were still little lads, he had become one of the most important men in Florence. A grave man and stern was he to look at, closely observant of the ways and manners of others, and easily moved to indignation by the sight of deeds of tyranny and oppression.

Many things there were to trouble loyal Florentines in those days of angry rivals and bitterly opposed parties, and it was in the first year of the fourteenth century, when Dante had been sent by his fellow-citizens as an ambassador to Rome to procure aid from the Pope, that the opposite party rose and banished all who were against them. First and foremost in the roll of exiles was Dante Alighieri, who was forbidden to set foot in the city again, and whose goods and possessions were forfeited. His wife, who belonged to an important family in Florence, still powerful in the new state of things, was sheltered and protected with her little ones, whilst Dante wandered sadly from city to city in Europe. From Rome to Paris, some say from Paris to Oxford, he went, always hoping and eagerly planning by some means to get back to his beloved Florence, but never again did he set foot in his native town. Writing of this miserable time, years later, he says, " Since it has pleased the most beautiful and most famous daughter of Rome, Florence, to cast me forth

from her sweetest bosom, through almost all the regions where this language is spoken I have gone a pilgrim, almost a beggar, striving against wrong, with the wounds of fortune. Truly I have been a bark without sail and without helm, blown about to different parts and coasts by the dry wind which miserable poverty breathes forth."

Presently he went to Bologna, and, under the shadow of her famous University, tried to forget his sorrow in hard study and writing. Here he was joined by his eldest son, now a lad of thirteen, and thought to be old enough to share his father's exile, and who must often have wondered why the grave, sad father, who seemed to know everything, was never again to return to dear familiar Florence. In the meantime, public feeling towards the exiled Dante had become a little less bitter, and, under a new *podestà*, some of his precious books, carefully stored and hidden away, were permitted to be sent to him. Amongst them was a manuscript with seven cantos of a poem begun in the early years of his married life. Many persons in the great towns of Italy knew of Dante's scholarship and genius, and with the unfinished poem there reached him a respectful and friendly request from the Marquis Mornello, a patron of learning, that he would go on and finish it. He wrote in reply, "I certainly supposed that this, along with all my other things and a quantity of writings, had been lost when my house was sacked, and therefore I felt my mind and my thoughts lightened of all care for it. But since it has pleased God that it should not be lost but sent back to me, I will do my best to follow up the work according to my first intention."

Comforted and inspired by the possession of his writings, and restored in his determination of long ago,



he at once resumed his great task, beginning the eighth canto with the words, "I say, continuing, that long before we reached the foot of the high tower"; and few people in reading the wonderful book to-day realize the long and sad interruption between the two cantos. For the fragment found and sent to him was the beginning of his "Vision," of which we shall tell in the next chapter. Those seven cantos were in Latin, but in the years that had passed since it was begun Dante had become more than ever convinced that the Tuscan tongue was worthy of poetry, so he translated them. The beginnings of great poems are always interesting to notice, and we read that his original lines opened thus: "Of the furthest realms will I sing, conterminous with the world of waters, which spread abroad for souls, doomed each to the reward of his deserts." The new version began thus, "In the midway of this our mortal life I found me in a gloomy wood, astray."

For many quiet months he worked at his great poem, copying it neatly into a small book of parchment. Then, when it was done, and he must again wander on, he left it with the monks of the monastery of Santa Croce del Corvo. Fra Ilario tells the story of how the tall traveller, whose face he did not know, when asked at the convent door, "What would you?" replied "Peace."

And then, handing to the monk the little book, he watched his astonishment at finding it written in the vulgar tongue, and explained why he had thus done. Taking farewell of the monastery, he travelled on, and presently rested at Pisa, the city against whose troops he had made his first adventure in soldiering those many years before. He appears to have been befriended by the most powerful noble of Tuscany, who liked to be thought the patron of poets and scholars, as well as a successful



warrior, and there he wrote the second book of his great work.

With the downfall of this Prince, Dante lost his home and journeyed on to Verona, where he found shelter at the court of the famous Can Grande, a cultured and magnificent ruler. He was proud to entertain such a genius, but Dante found it hard to be dependent upon the bounty and the moods of a capricious patron. He worked on at his poem, and, indeed, dedicated it to Can Grande, but it is easy to see that he felt the indignity of his lack of freedom. He makes a character in the book express his own feeling: "Thou shalt make trial of how salt doth taste another's bread, and how hard the path to descend and mount upon another's stair." Saddened and disappointed, besides being deep in thought about his poem, it is quite possible that Dante was not an easy talker, nor one adapted to make banquets mirthful and gay. A contemporary of his writes of him, "Dante Alighieri, my townsman, was a very enlightened man for compositions in the vulgar tongue, but in his habits and speech more independent than was agreeable to the delicate ears and eyes of the princes of our age. Who, being an exile from his country, and dwelling with Can Grande, then the universal refuge and consolation of the afflicted, was at first held by him in great honour, but little by little fell back, and from day to day became less agreeable to the prince." Petrarch tells how one day, as the poet formed one of a party of courtiers gathered around the great man, he was rallied for his sober looks, and unfavourably contrasted with the buffoon, clad in parti, making jests for his master's amusement. Dante with bitterness replied, "Like to Like!" Presently he could endure the foolish jests and contemptuous treatment no longer,

and wandered on to Ravenna, another stately city of Italy. There many people had heard of him, and he was received with homage and wonder. We read that the simple townfolk were half afraid of the quiet, stooping man with the deep, penetrating eyes; and that the women, spinning on their thresholds, would nudge each other and whisper, "Yonder goes he who has been to the other world and brought news of those long dead!" Here his two sons, Pietro and Jacopo, came to him, and he passed some peaceful years, finishing his great poem, and always longing, deep down in his heart, to see once more the towers of San Giovanni and his beloved Florence.

But it was not to be, and in September 1321 he died in the ancient city of Ravenna. "There," says a biographer, "he rendered his weary spirit to God, not without great sorrow of all the citizens." Even in death his fellow-townsmen of Florence could not forgive him, and they paid no funeral honours to his memory while he was being laid to rest in Ravenna. Centuries later his native city awoke to the greatness of her son, and begged his ashes from the town of his exile, only to be refused.

## Introduction II

DANTE AND BEATRICE

“ For certain he hath seen all perfectness  
Who among other ladies hath seen mine :  
They that go with her, humbly should combine  
To thank their God for such peculiar grace.  
So perfect is the beauty of her face  
That it begets in no wise any sign  
Of envy, but draws round her a clear line  
Of love, and blessed faith, and gentleness.”

*The New Life.*

THE beautiful child, Beatrice, or Bice, Portinari, whom Dante first met when he was eight years old, and she herself a few months younger, was destined to inspire him to the composition of one of the greatest and most wonderful poems in the world. The occasion of the meeting was a May feast, in the year 1274, given by Folco Portinari to his friends and neighbours and their children. Dante records that on that day, “ her dress was of a most noble colour, a subdued and goodly crimson, girdled and adorned in such sort as best suited with her very tender age.” Strangely enough, it seems to have been a long time, nine years indeed, as Dante emphatically notes, before he again met his ideal lady. He described the occasion thus : “ The same wonderful lady appeared to me dressed all in pure white, between two gentle ladies elder than she. And passing through a street, she turned her eyes thither where I

stood, sorely abashed, and by her unspeakable courtesy she saluted me with so virtuous a bearing that I seemed then and there to behold the very limits of blessedness." He tells us, too, that it was exactly the ninth hour of the day when the meeting took place, for throughout his life Dante showed himself in sympathy with the common beliefs in ancient and mediæval times that the number nine was one of mystic import.

The outcome of this event was a Vision, in which Dante beheld strange things which told of what should happen in the future. There appeared to him a lofty figure bearing a heart in flames, and murmuring, "Behold! thy heart!" This Vision occurred at the first of the nine last hours of the night; and full of delight, yet perplexed at what it should mean, Dante determined to reveal it to certain other poets by means of a Sonnet, and to invite their responses and interpretations. One of the men so honoured was Guido Cavalcanti, who thus became a friend of Dante, and is worthily commemorated by him.

It was part of the poetic fashion of the day for a young writer to clothe his imaginative work in the guise of chivalrous devotion to some beautiful woman, and to avow himself her spiritual knight and servant, as in earlier days adventurous spirits had constituted themselves warrior-champions of fair ladies. So we find Dante, in accordance with this dainty fancy, undertaking various experiments in order to do honour to his lady; amongst them being the curious one of enrolling in verse the names of sixty of the most beautiful women in Florence. It gave him great pleasure that the only place where "Beatrice" would fit musically was ninth on the list. But Dante was not content merely to exercise his gift for verse in pretty compliments. His adoring



THE SALUTATION OF BEATRICE





reverence for Beatrice so uplifted his soul and enlightened his mind that, years later, when he wove the whole story into a series of Sonnets, with a commentary, or "rubric," forming his autobiography, he entitled it "The New Life." This began with the meeting in the street at the age of eighteen, but had been dimly foreshadowed by the earlier one in his childhood, and lasted for nine years.

In this poetic story we read how jealously he guarded the secret of his devotion, even taking extreme pains to disguise it, lest it should be treated as one of the frivolous attachments of a cavalier. Yet at one time mischievous tongues made busy with his name to the lady of his devotion; and, meeting him on a certain day, she "withheld from him her most gracious salutation," to his infinite distress and sorrow. Apparently during all this time Dante pursued the ordinary life of a Florentine gentleman, never becoming intimate with the beautiful Beatrice, but meeting her on rare occasions in the street, or at some festive gathering, and always worshipping her from afar, till the miserable day mentioned above, when she "withheld her salutation." Evidently, however, his outward life was of small importance compared with that inner and devout one in which his spirit was absorbed. He tells us, in order that it may be understood of what surpassing blessedness was her salutation, that, "When she appeared in any place it seemed to me by the hope of her excellent salutation that there was no man mine enemy any longer, and such warmth of charity came upon me that most certainly in that moment I would have pardoned whosoever had done me an injury; and if one should then have questioned me concerning any matter, I could only have said unto him 'Love,' with a countenance clothed in humbleness." Nothing could more plainly show the transforming power of an ideal de-



votion than this subduing of the haughty, tempestuous, disdainful spirit of the young Dante to the breathing of gentle, tender humility. In later days he was to show the resolute will and the softened heart leagued together to do immortal honour to Beatrice ; in the meantime, a Vision which came to him " at the ninth hour of the night," showed him that he had been to blame in attempting to keep secret the fervour of his devotion, and thus had misled the judgment of others. So he composed a " Ditty " designed to reach the offended lady, beginning,

" Song, 'tis my will that thou do seek out Love  
And go with him where my dear Lady is ;  
That so my cause, the which thy harmonies  
Do plead, his better speech may clearly prove ;"

and her displeasure was banished, though never again was there the same unburdened joy in Dante's mind concerning her.

Some time later, the death of her father, Folco Portinari, overwhelmed him with grief for her sake, and he became ill. On the ninth day of his sickness he was seized with the thought that, " certainly it must some time come to pass that the gentle Beatrice will die " ; and the grievous Vision possessed him so that he saw her lying in death, and certain ladies covering her head with a white veil. On her face was that which said, " I have attained to behold the beginning of Peace," for thus early did the stormy soul of Dante realize that in Peace alone is bliss. Not immediately was the sad foreboding fulfilled, for Dante was able to see the gracious lady of his heart yet and again, as she trod the streets of Florence, " in such favour with all men that when she passed anywhere folk ran to behold her, which thing was a deep joy to me," he writes fervently. The lofty and spiritual nature

of his devotion is especially shown by the fact that during these years Beatrice married a Florentine gentleman, and thus would have been removed from his devotion had it been only that of an ordinary lover. But Dante never mentions or refers to her marriage in his "New Life," or in the greater work of which she was the inspiration. Throughout his whole career he seems to have enthroned her spiritual presence upon a pinnacle in his inmost spirit, and to have asked no external gratification beyond that of occasionally seeing her in the distance.

Nine years after the salutation in the street which marked the beginning of his "New Life" Dante had to endure the anguish foreseen in his Vision, and to hear the crushing word that Beatrice was dead ; " the Lord God of justice called my most gracious lady unto Himself." He dwells tenderly upon the exact day and hour of her death, seeing that " the number nine seems also to have borne a part in the manner of her death. For, according to the division of time in Italy, her most noble spirit departed from among us in the first hour of the ninth day of the month ; and, according to the division of time in Syria, in the ninth month of the year " ; in other words, at one o'clock on the 9th of June 1290. He writes, " After this most gracious creature had gone out from among us, the whole city came to be, as it were, widowed and despoiled of all dignity."

" Beatrice is gone up into high Heaven,  
The kingdom where the angels are at peace,  
And lives with them ; and to her friends is dead.  
Not by the frost of winter was she driven  
Away, like others ; nor by summer-heats ;  
But through a perfect gentleness, instead.  
For from the lamp of her meek lowlihead  
Such an exceeding glory went up hence

That it woke wonder in the Eternal Sire,  
 Until a sweet desire  
 Entered Him for that lovely excellence,  
 So that He bade her to Himself aspire ;  
 Counting this weary and most evil place  
 Unworthy of a thing so full of grace."

Indeed it seems to be no exaggeration that all Florence mourned for the gentle lady whose beauty and gracious ways had endeared her to all. Amongst the men and women who knew her well there was a generous rivalry as to who could best compose, or most reverently recite, dirges and elegies to her memory. Dante describes how a band of Pilgrims, passing through Florence on their way to Rome, were amazed and bewildered by the air of gloom and mourning cast over the city, and going home, he composed a Sonnet that should connect them with the general sadness :—

" Ye pilgrim-folk, advancing pensively,

Passing through the mournful town midway  
 Like unto men that understand to-day  
 Nothing at all of her great misery. . . .

Yet if ye will but stay, whom I accost,  
 And listen to my words a little space,  
 At going ye shall mourn with a loud voice :—  
 ' It is her Beatrice that she hath lost.' "

Once again a mysterious Vision came to Dante in which he was shown something of the Future Life which his revered lady had entered upon ; in his own words, " A very wonderful Vision, wherein I saw things which determined me that I would say nothing further of this most blessed one, until such time as I could discourse more worthily concerning her. And to this end I labour all I can, as she well knoweth. Wherefore if it be His plea-

sure through Whom is the life of all things, that my life continue with me a few years, it is my hope that I shall yet write concerning her what hath not before been written of any woman."

For many years Dante nursed this resolve deep down in his heart, in the meantime studying hard and throwing himself completely into the political life and contests of Florence. Amongst the ladies known to Beatrice, and who mourned for her, was a certain Gemma Donati, a member of one of the oldest and most honoured families of the city. This lady seems to have combined in her person and character some of the graces so idealized in Beatrice, and when Dante had taken up in earnest the burden of Florentine life and politics, he married her. This, however, he never mentions in his writings, nor does it seem to have affected in any way the inner life of the spirit in which he had enshrined the beautiful Beatrice. His severer studies resulted in certain Latin treatises, in one of which he discusses the nature of Civilisation and Government, and describes his ideal State as one supreme spiritual power symbolised by the Pope, and one supreme civil power in the person of the Emperor. In another he searches into the origin of language, and argues eloquently for his darling theory of the special fitness of the Tuscan tongue for the expression of the highest thought.

Also in precious, secret hours of leisure he had planned out and begun the great work by which he meant to do honour to the memory of Beatrice. In accordance with his sense of the mystical value of the number nine, and its sub-multiple three, he designed to treat of the Vision vouchsafed to him soon after her death in Three Books, with thirty-three cantos in each, and an introductory canto as a prelude. Also the metre was to be that of the three-lined stanza, or *terza rima*. The subjects of the

Three Books were Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, and in remembrance of the comfort and enlightenment which came to him soon after the death of Beatrice, he at first called it "The Vision." In this he had some great models, for as in early ages of the world dreams and visions had played an important part in the life of mankind, so, in mediæval times, the story told in the form of a Vision had become a favourite kind of literature.

Dante, with his wide reading, must have been familiar with Cicero's "Vision of Scipio," and with the work of a great Christian mystic of the twelfth century, known as "The Vision of Frate Alberico." Amongst lesser examples was that of his old schoolmaster, Ser Brunetto Latini, called the "Tesoretto." In all these an attempt was made to give some account of the mysteries of the Life after Death, and of the rewards and penalties of man's good and evil conduct upon earth. Thus Dante adopted a popular method of conveying his great message, and, as we have seen in the preceding chapter, translated the seven cantos which he had written before his banishment into the popular Tuscan tongue, so that his work, instead of being suited only to scholars, should appeal to all his countrymen. He linked himself, too, to the feeling of the time in making Virgil his guide through the shadows of Hell and Purgatory, whose descriptions in the Sixth Book of the *Æneid* Dante's often recall. In the joyful region of Heaven, the scene of the Third Book, the blessed Beatrice herself is his guide and tutor. As his work progressed Dante changed his original intention of calling it "The Vision of Dante Alighieri," and entitled it "The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, a Florentine by Nation." The original meaning of "Comedy" was that of "action, moving on towards a happy ending," and not at all what we now understand by the word. Though



the poem is "one of the saddest in the world" the name, according to its old meaning, is appropriate. Two centuries later the reverence in which the work was held led to the addition of "Divine" to the title, and as the "Divine Comedy," or "Divina Commedia," it has been best known ever since. It is full of sad and stirring pictures of the heroes of Greece and Rome and of more distant ages still, and the women whom they loved; of Emperors and Pontiffs and Princes of Christendom; of Charlemagne's warriors and crusading knights; of Saints and Martyrs of the Church; of the illustrious men and women of Europe, with numbers of those who were living in his own day; scholars and artists; soldiers and troubadours; statesmen and rulers; all are shown to us as enduring, or achieving, in the other world according to their deeds in life. The romantic histories of some of these characters will be presented in these "Stories from Dante."

The story has been told in the preceding chapter of the fortunate recovery of the first seven cantos of the poem after the banishment of their writer from his beloved city. A somewhat similar fate befell the thirteen last cantos of the Third Book. Through his many journeyings the precious manuscripts were entrusted to different hands, and after the breach of Dante's friendship with his noble patron, Can Grande, he forbore to send him the cantos as they were finished. In his last loneliness at Ravenna he hid them away, unread to any sympathising friend; and after his death his two sons were distressed to find nothing of the latter part of the poem. Some months later a vision came to the younger, Jacopo, in which he was shown a recess behind a panel in the room in which his father had lived. Friends went with him to the spot, and "found a wooden panel fitted into the wall such as

they had always been accustomed to see, and, removing this, they found in the wall a little window which none of them had ever seen nor known to be there. In this they found many writings, moulded by the damp of the wall ; and when they had carefully cleared them from the mould they found in continuous order the thirteen missing cantos."

According to tradition Dante, living in Ravenna under the protection of its lord, Guido Novello da Polenta, " by his teachings trained many scholars in poetry," especially in the Tuscan language, thus winning many to give up writing in Latin. In the month of September 1321 Dante fell sick and died, and the "magnanimous cavalier Guido placed the dead body upon a funeral bier adorned with poetic insignia, and had it borne on the shoulders of his most distinguished citizens to the place of the Minor Friars in Ravenna. And here he had him placed in a stone chest wherein he still lieth." In an epitaph intended for his tomb by a poet of Bologna, it is written : " In one thousand three hundred and three times seven years of the Deity, he went back, on September's Ides, to his own stars." This is a quiet reference to his manner of ending each of the Three Books of the Divine Comedy. The close of the "Inferno" is, "Thence we came forth to re-behold the stars": of the "Purgatorio," "I returned regenerate, pure and disposed to mount unto the stars": and of the "Paradiso," "The Love which moves the sun and other stars."



Part One  
The Inferno

*“ Here sighs, with lamentations and loud moans,  
Resounded through the air, pierced by no star. . .”*

DANTE.

*“ Through many a dark and dreary vale  
They passed, and many a region dolorous,  
O'er many a frozen, many a fiery Alp,  
Rocks, caves, lakes, fens, bogs, dens, and shades  
of death,  
A universe of death.”*

MILTON.

# I

## The Inferno

**I**N the early ages of European history the Earth was believed to be the centre of the Universe, stationary in space, with the Sun and the Planets revolving about it. This is called the Ptolemaic system of Astronomy, after the great mathematician Ptolemy of Alexandria, whose book *The Almagest* contained all that was known of the subject in the second century after Christ. In Dante's day, and for some centuries later, this was the conception of the Universe which every one held. In the sixteenth century the astronomers Copernicus and Kepler discovered that the Sun is the centre, the Earth and the other Planets moving around it ; and in the early seventeenth century Galileo published the discovery more widely. The new idea was, however, very slowly accepted ; and readers will remember that Milton's descriptions in *Paradise Lost* are in agreement with the Ptolemaic system, though in Book VIII. he represents the angel Raphael as describing to Adam the possibility of another terrestrial motion.

Besides the mapping out of the Universe with the Earth as centre, early Christian thought also held that Heaven, Hell and Purgatory, the abodes of departed spirits, had actual geographical positions. Hell, as

prepared for Satan on his rebellion in Heaven, lay at the centre of the Earth, where was a gloomy region with a bottomless lake in the midst. Milton, we remember, thus describes the vast distance between the realms of Heaven and Hell :—

“ Nine days they fell . . . hell at last  
Yawning, received them whole and on them closed,”

and reproduces mediæval thought as to the surroundings of Hell and the Universe in his account of Satan’s journey to Earth. Emerging from the gate of Hell,

“ A dark

Illimitable ocean, without bound,  
Without dimension, where length, breadth, and height  
And time and place, are lost ; where Eldest Night  
And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold  
Eternal anarchy . . . Chaos umpire sits  
And by decision more embroils the fray  
By which he reigns ; next him, high arbiter  
Chance governs all. . . ”<sup>1</sup>

In this he is handing on the poetic tradition of Dante, who, in his turn, had used much of the material of the classical poets Virgil and Homer. Virgil’s impressive Book VI. of the *Æneid* relating the visit of Æneas to the realm of Pluto, god of the underworld, was based upon Homer’s description of the Cimmerian land of shades and darkness, beyond the extreme boundaries of the purple ocean.

Dante pictures the approach to the bottomless burning lake, the abode of the Evil one, as a deep funnel-shaped cavity. Round its circular sides are great terraces, the “ circles ” of the description, with perilous descents from one to another. Down the terrible banks flow four

<sup>1</sup> *Paradise Lost*, Bk. II.



THE ENTRANCE TO HELL.



sluggish rivers, winding their way through marshes towards the burning lake : Acheron, the river of sorrow ; Styx, the river of hate ; Phlegethon, whose waters were torrent fire ; and Lethe, which from Purgatory drained the memory of sin away into the forgetfulness of the eternal deep.

Led by Virgil through the recesses of the dark wood in which he found himself astray, Dante reaches the grim massive portals which are the entrance to Hell. In the strange gloom he can just make out an inscription high on the arch :—

“ Through me you pass into the city of woe :  
Through me you pass into eternal pain :  
Through me among the people lost for aye . . .  
All hope abandon, ye who enter here.”

Just within is a vast plain crowded with hurrying spirits, all confusedly following a wavering flag. These are the souls of those who in life were never in earnest, never decided, winning neither praise nor blame. Virgil explains why they are there in the outer boundaries of Hell, perpetually in motion : “ Heaven chased them forth to keep its beauty from impair, and the deep Hell receives them not, for the wicked would have some glory over them.”

Passing on they come to the bank of the river Acheron, where Charon waits to ferry the souls across. Dante swoons with fear, and when he awakes finds that they are on the other side and within the First Circle of the nether world, called by the ancients Limbo. This region is inhabited by sighing spirits who desire God : the souls of those who lived before Christ, only so far afflicted that “ without hope we live in desire.” One small hemisphere of light shines through the dimness, and on reaching it Dante sees the spirits of great and noble men and women



of the heathen world : Homer, Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Lucretia, Cornelia, Empedocles, Democritus, Euclid, Ptolemy, Galen, and others.

Descending to the next circle, the first of the inner Hell, Dante beholds at the gateway Minos, the Judge of the infernal regions ; and within he is baffled and confused by rushing gales of wind blowing in all directions. In this place, "void of light and a noise as of the sea in tempest," are the souls of those who on earth chose to live evil lives of pleasure ; amongst them Dido of Carthage, Helen of Troy, Achilles and Paris.

In the next circle, where suffer the souls of those who on earth were gluttonous and greedy, there pours a continual storm of hail, rain and snow from which shelter is impossible, and the hound Cerberus barks and worries his miserable charges incessantly. Here Dante recognises a rich Florentine of his own day, notorious in life for his greedy appetite and nicknamed therefore "Ciaccio."

Next they come to the circle where dwell the souls of the Avaricious and the Prodigal. Plutus, god of Riches, who guards the entrance, utters inarticulate sounds of rage at the appearance of one yet alive in the body. All the wretched spirits in this place are rolling heavy weights before them—the Prodigals in one direction, the Avaricious in another. Thus they smite one against the other, and with bitter reproaches turn and drive their burdens in the opposite directions, only soon to meet and mutually upbraid again. Virgil explains, "Ill-giving and Ill-keeping has deprived them of the bright world. . . . All the gold that is beneath the moon, or ever was, could not give rest to a single one of these weary souls."

In the next circle, which is all marshy and bog-like from the slow stream of the Styx, are angry spirits rending and tearing each other in the mud, who, Dante learns, were

the Wrathful and the Gloomy on earth. Remorseful and miserable they cry, " Sullen were we in the sweet air that is gladdened by the sun, carrying lazy smoke within our hearts ; now lie we sullen here in the black mire."

Crossing the marsh to the Fifth Circle in the boat of Phlegyas, Dante recognises a spirit tormented in the miry bog as that of Filippo Argenti, a haughty Florentine, whose waywardness and caprice made him generally detested in his lifetime. Sounds of lamentation are heard, and Virgil warns Dante that they are nearing the City of Dis. Within those doleful walls were punished graver sins than those of appetite and temper, and the gate is guarded by the Three Furies. An angel puts the evil ones to flight, and the two travellers enter the gates to find themselves on a wide plain where are many burning sepulchres in which are punished the Heretics, with their followers. From one of the tombs peers the anguished face of the great Ghibelline, Farinata degli Uberti, father-in-law of Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's poet-friend ; and then he sees Cavalcante de Cavalcanti, Guido's father. In ominous words the Ghibelline chief warns Dante of his lasting exile from the city they both had loved so well.

Thus far the journey has led Dante and his guide through the first of the Three great divisions of Hell. They then come to the Seventh Circle, the first of the Second great division in which suffer those who committed violence on earth. This term includes not only murders and robberies, but also offences against the souls of others by flattery, secret theft, sorcery, and evil temptations. The descent is steep and perilous, amongst loose stones where footing is insecure, and a poisonous stench arises from below which nearly overcomes the trembling Dante. Phlegethon, the river of blood, lies at the bottom, enclosing two other parts of this, the Seventh

Circle, and in its terrible stream wade the spirits of the Violent. Nessus, the Centaur, carries Dante across the river, and tells him who are the figures he sees in the flood. Amongst them are Dionysius, tyrant of Syracuse in the fourth century before Christ ; Ezzelino the Cruel, a great Ghibelline chief who died a few years before Dante was born ; the Marquis da Este, a leading Guelf of his own time ; and Guy de Montfort, murderer of Prince Henry of England, son of the Duke of Cornwall.

Beyond the river they come to a terrible wood, wherein strange and distorted growths of bushes and shrubs imprisoned the souls of those who had taken their own lives. Dante, plucking a spray from a large thorn-tree, hears a wailing voice from it, " Why dost thou rend me ? " The spirit is that of Pietro delle Vigne, Secretary and Chancellor to the Emperor Frederic II., who, in despair at the injustice of the treatment he received, took his life in prison.

On leaving the sorrowful wood they emerge upon a plain of burning sand, under a continually falling shower. Here are the hurrying spirits of the self-willed and extravagant, driven in bands by whirling blasts at speeds differing according to the degrees of their guilt. Dante's robe was plucked by one who sped past, and as he bent to see the parched, upturned face, he knew it for that of his old master and tutor, Ser Brunetto Latini. Farther on he saw crouching figures with pouches hung from their necks upon which he could see designs embossed. From these he knew the sufferers to be certain rich money-lenders of Padua and Florence.

Then follows one of the strangest experiences of all this terrifying journey. A huge monster, Geryon, resembling the Dragon of the Book of Revelation, is ensnared by Virgil, who dangles the girdle worn by Dante over the

edge of the abyss; and, as the huge creature rests its front upon the bank, the two travellers mount upon its back: "As the monster felt himself quite loose, there, where his breast had been he turned his tail, and, stretching, moved it, and with his paws gathered the air to him. . . . I saw myself in the air on all sides, and saw extinguished every sight, save of the beast. He goes on swimming, slowly, slowly; wheels and descends, but I perceive it not, otherwise than by a wind upon my face and from below. On the right hand I heard the whirlpool make a hideous roaring under us . . . then at the bottom Geryon set us, close to the foot of the ragged rock."

Thus they pass by a narrow shaft down to the Eighth Circle. This consists of a broad shelving terrace slanting down towards another narrower shaft, divided into ten deep fosses, with narrow passage-ways from one to another. They turn to the left along the outermost ridge, and stand where they can see the occupants of these evil lairs (*Male bolge*). Amongst the number, all mire bespattered, are the Greek Jason; Simon the Sorcerer, whom St Peter rebuked; Aruns, the Soothsayer, who prophesied the death of Pompey; Michael Scot, the wizard whom the Emperor Frederic II. honoured in his court; two of the Knights of St Mary who betrayed their trust in Bologna; Caiaphas and Annas; Agnello Brunelleschi, and other Florentine nobles who robbed the city which trusted them; Ulysses and Diomed, bathed in flame wherein "they groan for the ambush of the Wooden Horse, and for the Palladium they suffer punishment"; and lastly Guido da Montefeltro, a Ghibelline of great renown in Dante's time. Arriving at the Ninth of the Ten great fosses, Dante sees, amongst the "sowers of Scandal and Schism," Mahomet; one Fra Dolcino, burnt for heresy early in the fourteenth

century ; Malatestino da Rimini, who broke his truce in a parley ; Mosca dei Lamberti, who advised that young Buondelmonte should be slain, with the sinister words, " A thing done hath an end " ; and Bertrand de Born, the Troubadour-Baron of Hautefort, who stirred up strife between King Henry II. of England and his sons.

In the tenth and last of the divisions of the dreadful *Male bolge* Dante sees the spirits of Falsifiers, in things, as Alchemists and Forgers ; in deeds, as Impersonators of others for fraudulent purposes ; and in words, as Slandrous Accusers. Amongst these are one Grifolino of Arezzo, who pretended to be able to teach Count Alberto of Sienna to fly ; Adamo of Brescia, a coiner, who counterfeited the Florentine golden florin ; and Simon the Greek, who induced the Trojans to receive the Wooden Horse.

Leaving this great and horrible circle the travellers reach the Ninth, where they are in awful nearness to the very realm of Satan. A thick and gloomy air oppresses them, and as they approach the edge of the Pit they see huge giants standing round it. There are Nimrod, who sought to build the tower of Babel ; Tityus and Typhon, rebels against Jupiter ; and Briareus, the many-headed. One of them, Antæus, who is unfettered, lifts them down the terrible shaft, and they find themselves in the frozen region, farthest from the sun, and bereft of light. There are four great rings in each of which grievous sinners dwell. In the outermost, called *Caïna* after the first murderer, are those who have killed their kindred ; in the second, called *Antenora*, after the Trojan Antenor, betrayer of his own land, are the traitors to their country ; in the third, *Ptolomæa*, which is so named after Ptolomæus, son-in-law of Simon the High Priest (I. Maccabees XVI.), are the traitors to their friends ; and in the innermost,





THE SEVENTH CIRCLE





the *Judecca*, after Judas Iscariot, are those who were traitors to their benefactors. In these four doleful places Dante finds the two sons of Count Alberto degli Alberti, who quarrelled over their inheritance and killed each other ; Bocca degli Abbati, whose treachery led to the Florentine defeat at Montaperti ; Count Ugolino and Archbishop Ruggiero, traitors both ; and in sad companionship, Judas Iscariot and Brutus and Cassius, betrayers of their Masters.

The horror of this region exceeds that of any previous one : the unhappy spirits are prisoned in ice which yet seems to let them move with agony, only to freeze in deadlier embrace the next moment. The two brothers weep tears which freeze as they fall and seal the poor eyes scalded the moment before ; the cruel Ugolino and his victim are closely locked together, Ruggiero's hunger perpetually gnawing at Ugolino's head ; in the last and lowest round " the souls were wholly covered and shone through like straw in glass " ; and there is the Emperor of the dolorous realm, Satan, once the fairest angel in Heaven, now hideous and distorted ; and holding in perpetual grasp the arch-traitor Judas and his Roman imitators.

Virgil leads the trembling Dante across the enormous furrows made by the outspread wings of the Evil One ; and at length, after a perilous passage, they reach the opposite side of the *Judecca*, or innermost depths, and guided by the sound of a rivulet which has eaten a channel in the rock they enter a hidden road, " to return to the bright world ; and without caring for any rest we mounted up, he first and I second, so far that I distinguished through a round opening the beauteous things which Heaven bears ; and thence we issued out again to see the Stars." (*Inferno* xxxiv.)

## II

# The Poet Virgil

B.C. 70-19

“ At Rome my life was past  
Beneath the mild Augustus, in the time  
Of fabled deities and false. A bard  
Was I, and made Anchises' upright son  
The subject of my song, who came from Troy  
When the flames prey'd on Ilium's haughty towers.”

*Inferno i.*

**P**UBLIUS VERGILIUS MARO was born in the year B.C. 70 in the little hamlet of Andes, afterwards called Pietola, near Mantua. His father was a small farmer cultivating his own land, and thus Virgil had early opportunities for making acquaintance at first hand with country life and work. When he was twelve years old he was sent to school at Cremona, where he learned to read and write and was taught the rudiments of Latin Grammar. He evidently showed some quickness and industry in his work, for when he was sixteen, and able to assume the *toga* in place of the short tunic, his father sent him on to Milan, the capital of the province, for more advanced teaching.

The district of “ Cisalpine Gaul ” was not one of the principal Roman provinces, hence its inhabitants were not considered to possess all the liberties of full Roman citizens when Virgil was a boy ; but a few years later its

dignity was increased, and it shared full "Latin rights." Readers will remember the importance of this condition when, a century later, a certain enthusiast and reformer, one Paul of Tarsus, "a citizen of no mean city," challenged the right of the Roman officer to order him, "a Roman," to be scourged. The perplexed Captain protested, "With a great sum obtained I this freedom," and heard his captive proudly retort, "But I was free-born."

A lad of sixteen entering upon his studies at Milan would in those days take the course of the Liberal Arts. These subjects, Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric, Geometry, Arithmetic, Astronomy, Music, Medicine and Architecture, were afterwards most of them included in the famous *Trivium* and *Quadrivium*. The Romans, at this time Masters of the World, cherished the old Greek learning and literature; and, indeed, like England in the days of Henry VIII., they had as yet but few great writers of their own. Greek Plays, Greek Philosophy and Greek History, were both subjects of study and models for Latin writers. A high value was attached to knowledge, and as all race differences were sunk in the one great division of "Roman" citizen or not Roman citizen, so the distinction between Greek and Latin birth was bridged by the knowledge of Greek thought. The great division of humanity under this world-power was into "bond" and "free"; and while the bondman might be, and often was, highly taught and trained in some particular form of excellence that he might be a useful *tool*, the free man was felt to have the right to an education which would enable him to live well and independently, and be a worthy *man*. This is the original sense of the term a "liberal education."

Although some of the Greek writers had been translated into Latin in the first century B.C., yet a knowledge of

Greek was most necessary for any real appreciation of Greek thought. Hence we find that after two years at Milan young Virgil went on to Naples, which was famous for its Greek professors. For a lad of his age and standing only two professions were open if he desired a life other than that of an independent land-holder ; he could become a lawyer or a soldier. Virgil appears to have been of slight frame and delicate in health, so that he could not enter the Army, and presently he left Naples for Rome in order to study law and especially the arts of oratory and rhetoric. This journey would be the ambition of every high-hearted young man, especially of one who knew something of his country's history and greatness. We remember that the great Missionary Apostle nursed the hope in the midst of his absorbing work and manifold journeys : " After that I must see Rome also." Every Roman was proud of it, of its situation, of its buildings and busy life, of its power and wealth. The historian Livy, who was only a year younger than Virgil, thus describes it : " Not without good cause both God and man chose this place for the building of the city : most healthy and wholesome hills ; a very convenient and commodious river to bring in corn and other fruits out of the inland parts ; the sea itself near enough for commodities, and not exposed and open by too much nearness to the dangers of foreign navies ; the very heart and centre of Italy ; a place, as a man would say, naturally made for that city to grow and increase in." It has been pointed out, too, that a century later, when the Empire of Trajan was at its greatest, the city of Rome stood midway between its farthest parts. From Northumberland in Britain to Rome was about the same distance as from Jerusalem to Rome ; from Gibraltar to Rome balanced the opposite distance from Rome to Bulgaria ;

so that the city was geographically, as well as politically, the centre of the civilised world.

Rome, as Virgil saw it, fifty years before the Birth of Christ, was, however, a very different Rome from that with whose descriptions we are familiar. As yet there were of course none of the memorials of Imperial and Christian Rome ; none of the palaces, and only a few of the " arches," so frequent in later times. But there were many massive and splendid buildings, old and new ; as the Arch of Fabius (Cunctator), the Citadel, the Temples of Jupiter, Janus, Castor and Pollux, the Capitol and the Senate-House. During Virgil's time there, the Shrine of Juturna, the Temple of Mars, the Basilica Julia (great law-courts) and the Pons Fabricius were being built. Columns and statues of great warriors and statesmen were to be seen in many of the open spaces of the city, and baths and theatres, forts and towers, were crowded together in the narrow streets. So narrow were these that during the " perpetual dictatorship " of Julius Cæsar, he ordered that no wheeled vehicles should pass through the city by day. In the Forum, or great central market-place, gathered all the merchants and dealers, the lawyers and senators ; and from Rostra, or pulpits, announcements of laws, treaties, victories, and political news, were made. From them, too, spoke the orators ; for in Republican Rome life was mostly lived in the open air, and oratory served in place of newspapers and books.

Since the days when Virgil listened to the pleadings and arguments of the great lawyers whom he thought to imitate, there have been many changes, and Republican Rome is buried beneath later stages in the history of the city : beneath Imperial, Christian and Mediæval Rome, as our Roman London lies beneath Saxon and Norman and Tudor London. But a few memorials of that time



remain, and travellers of to-day who look upon them realise that Virgil and Julius Cæsar and the Emperor Augustus and S. Paul may each have seen those mighty stones. One such is a monument to a Roman citizen of the time of Virgil: one Caius Cestius, whose marble pyramid is known to every British traveller in Rome to-day, because near it lie buried the remains of the poets Keats and Shelley.

After some years' study in Rome and the hearing of many pleadings and arguments by the great lawyers of the day, Virgil had to decide that the profession of the law was not for him. He could not acquire the readiness in argument so necessary in spoken disputes, and his voice was not suited to open-air speaking. Hence, in the year B.C. 42, when Brutus and Cassius were defeated at Philippi, he returned to his father's home near Mantua. The conquering general, Octavianus, soon to be the Emperor Augustus, had rewarded his military leaders with lands in various parts of Cisalpine Gaul, and the little estate of Vergilius Maro had been one of those so distributed. It thus happened that the first occasion on which Virgil had speech with his royal master was when he appeared before him to plead for the restitution of his father's property. The estate was returned to him, and he settled down to live quietly away from the noise of cities and to practise the art of verse. Some short poems were believed to have been written by him at this time though modern scholars doubt his authorship of them. One of them, *Culex*, was translated by Spenser as "Virgil's Gnat." The greater part of his time, however, appears to have been given to studying the great poem of Lucretius, "On the Nature of Things," and the beautiful idyls of the Greek poet Theocritus.

We are told that he had early formed a resolution to





VIRGIL IN ROME.



write a great poem to commemorate the glory of Rome as Homer had sung of the glory of Troy. Like our own poets, Milton, Wordsworth and Tennyson, he found that much study and thought were necessary before he could be able to undertake such a task. We may think of him in the quiet country round Mantua, as we think of Tennyson eighteen centuries later in Lincolnshire, observing and learning Nature's ways and the pleasant familiar things of a simple life ; so that in the descriptions in their poetry there are found the most delicate little touches which bring before us the appearance or the behaviour of things hardly noticed before.

Virgil's first verse to be made known to the world was some selections from pastoral descriptions written in imitation of Theocritus ; and a great statesman, who perhaps had at some time been a fellow-student with Virgil, admired them so much that he brought them to the notice of the Emperor Augustus. This Roman gentleman, who cared greatly for all forms of learning, from this time became the friend and patron of Virgil, protecting him in the possession of his lands, and ensuring for him sufficient means upon which to live that he might devote himself to his writing.

At this time, although the Roman power was not secure in Africa and in Asia, yet at home, in Italy, there was peace. This gave opportunity for making progress in quiet good government and the cultivation of the land. So while statesmen planned and governors enforced the practice of settled life and attention to agriculture, writers and poets took splendid occasion to spread the ideas of peace. For while at times they may be needed to stir the minds of men to resistance or martial achievement, it is equally theirs to show the beauty of another kind of patriotism, that of doing honest work as good

citizens. Virgil used this opportunity, and following in the steps of the great Greek poet, Hesiod, whose "Works and Days," written seven centuries before, had told of "tilling the soil and times for ploughing and seasons of harvest," he wrote a series of poems in praise of the arts of peace. These he dedicated to his patron, Mæcenas, "I begin, Mæcenas, to sing of crops, trees, cattle and bees,"

"What makes glad crops of corn, beneath what star  
To turn the ground, the vines and elms to pair,  
What care befits the kine, what course the flock,  
What skill the keep of bees."

He emphasises the dignity of his subject by introducing the legend of how, after the Golden Age in which the earth had produced without the labour of men, when Jupiter made serpents and wolves to become hurtful and storms to rage and the earth barren, then Ceres taught the art of ploughing. But he also goes into the smallest details of farm-work and agricultural tools, finding, as Wordsworth found, deep meaning and value in the simplest and most homely parts of life.

As the years passed and the victories of Augustus made the Roman Empire supreme everywhere, it seemed that the great Epic poem which he had always meant to write should be begun. He had thought of taking for his subject the brilliant achievements of Alexander, but later determined to celebrate the greatness of Rome, and to prophesy her high destiny to conquer the world and found an Empire.

He planned the work in Twelve Books; the first one relating the shipwreck of Æneas as he sails to Italy, after the fall of Troy, bearing with him his aged father, Anchises. In this way Virgil connects Roman history

with Greece and its famous story, and in the eighth book he describes the founding of Rome. The second and third books give the story of the wanderings of Æneas as told by him to Dido, Queen of Carthage; the fourth and fifth, his leaving Carthage and the funeral celebrations of Anchises; and the sixth book, the most wonderful of all, records the visit of Æneas to the realm of Dis, the Underworld. Here he sees the spirits of the dead, and of future great men who are to win fame and glory for Rome.

It was on account of the mystery and sacredness of this part that Dante chose in his "Vision" to represent Virgil as his guide in his journey through Hades and Purgatory.

For ten happy years Virgil worked at the *Æneid*, residing sometimes at Rome, sometimes on his farm at Mantua, and sometimes in attendance on the Emperor Augustus. His patron Mæcenas and the Emperor heard parts of the great work as they were finished, and rejoiced that so splendid a monument should be raised to the honour of the Empire. The news spread amongst all who cared for Literature that a poem greater even than the *Iliad* was about to appear. It is not surprising that in the midst of such anticipation the poet's heart at times should have failed him, and he feared that he might not, after all, achieve any worthy thing.

When he had been working at his great Epic for about four years the Emperor requested him to read some of it to him, and Virgil wrote in reply, "As to my Æneas, if I had anything worth your hearing, I would gladly send it, but the work is so vast that I think I was crazy to undertake it, and larger studies must constantly be pursued with a view to its accomplishment." And marvellously he enriched his poem with those "larger



studies." Religion, history, tradition, customs, patriotic associations and national games, adventures by fire and water and thrilling deeds of love and war, are woven together in polished and musical verse.

In the year B.C. 19, Virgil travelled in the Emperor's suite from Athens back to Italy, and suffered much from the extreme heat and vapours of the marshy lands about Megara. Sailing round the coast to Brindisium he was put ashore there and borne to the palace of Mæcnas. In a few days he died, and his body was carried to Naples with great honour, and buried in the obelisk of a milestone a little way outside the town.

Something of the old timidity which had prevented Virgil becoming an orator led him to ask his friends, as he lay dying, to destroy the manuscript of the *Æneid*, as he felt it to be quite worthless. The Emperor forbade this, and ordered it to be transcribed and published. It at once became famous and was studied with Homer's *Iliad* and the works of Catullus, and as the years passed it was more and more highly esteemed. In the Middle Ages, when Christian scholars discouraged the study of most pre-Christian writers, an exception was made in favour of Virgil. It was believed that he was specially blessed, and, had he lived until the time of Christ, would have acknowledged and followed Him.

More than this, traditions of marvellous things in connection with him were firmly held. It was thought (probably through rumours of the contents of Book VI.) that he had been a magician, and that his writings had a mysterious power and meaning beyond their intended purpose. Hence they were used as a means of discovering the future, by opening a volume at random and observing the lines revealed. The Emperor Severus is said to have consulted this *Sortes Virgilianæ*, opening at the



words, "Forget not thou, O Roman, to rule the people with royal sway." The practice lasted long after mediæval times ; King Charles I. and Lord Falkland once making trial of it with unhappy omen.

In Dante's day the people of the great cities of Italy—Florence, Pisa, Genoa, Venice, Milan, which were almost free republics, whether owning allegiance to Pope or to Emperor—cherished most devotedly their connection with, and descent from, Imperial Rome. Soldiers copied its military valour, statesmen its spirit of justice, scholars admired its learning, poets and thinkers its philosophy and poetry. In the person of Virgil many of these seemed to be combined. He had lived during Rome's most brilliant period, close to the person of the first Emperor, whose haughty title is still given to the most distinguished age in any history. The "Augustan Age" in the literature of a nation is its proudest era, and thus is commemorated the Rome of Virgil, as well as the thing to which the term is applied. He had studied and contributed to Roman learning ; had celebrated the early history and greatness of Rome ; had done honour to her religion, her customs, her sacred places, and hence seemed very specially to represent the Italy of the past.

Popular tradition and superstition had felt the influence of this high reverence for Virgil, and had translated it into something more readily understood. So, to ignorant people the name of Virgil was honoured as that of a benevolent wizard, who though frail of person and having power neither in arms nor in speech, could bring about what he desired to come to pass. All kinds of miraculous happenings became connected with his name : he could understand the speech of animals and birds, and used to converse with them in the Mantuan woods ; he could instantaneously cause himself to be

wafted from Rome to Pietola ; he could control the genii of Vesuvius, and the spirits of the sea and the mountains, and so on.

Dante felt especial reverence for Virgil on account of his poetry, and claimed to have based his own study of the art upon the works of the great Master of Song. He sympathised too with Virgil's way of thought ; in this, differing from his friend and fellow poet Guido Cavalcanti ; and, above all, he held firmly to the conviction that Virgil was a Christian in everything but time, he had handled with reverence certain manuscripts said to have been possessed, and partly written, by Virgil himself, and believed him to have been especially guided by Divine wisdom. Hence he selects him to be his guide in his journey through the spirit world as far as human science and philosophy can suffice ; and tells us, in the opening of his great poem, how while wandering in a dark wood, beset by terrible animals, he saw before him a tall figure, and cried to him,

“ Have mercy on me !  
Spirit or living man ! whate'er thou be.”

The reply came,

“ Now not man, man once I was  
And born of Lombard parents, Mantuans both  
By country, when the power of Julius yet  
Was scarcely firm.”

Dante exclaimed,

“ And art thou then that Virgil, that well-spring  
From which such copious floods of eloquence  
Have issued ?  
Glory and light of all that tuneful train !  
May it avail me, that I long with zeal  
Have sought thy volume, and with love immense  
Have conn'd it o'er. My master, thou, and Guido.”

The spirit of the dead poet replied and offered to lead Dante out of the perilous wood, and to show him what he could of the world of departed souls. Dante answered him,

“ Bard ! by that God whom thou didst not adore  
I do beseech thee . . . lead me where thou saidst,  
That I St Peter’s gate may view, and those  
Who, as thou tell’st, are in such dismal plight.”

Then the wonderful journey began, in which, after Virgil had led him as far as he could, the spirit of the Blessed Beatrice came to him and showed him the higher glories perceived only by faith.

“ Onward he moved, I close his steps pursued.”

### III

## The Story of Bertrand de Born

1148-1210

“ Behold now the sore penalty,  
Thou who dost breathing go the dead beholding ;  
Behold if any be as great as this.  
And so that thou may carry news of me,  
Know that Bertrand de Born am I, the same  
Who gave to the Young King the evil counsel.”

*Inferno* xxviii.

**O**F all the bold and warlike barons who served Henry, King of England, Duke of Aquitaine, as their feudal lord, the boldest and fiercest was the Viscount de Born, Seigneur of Autafort. His father died while Bertrand was still a young man, leaving his castle and estates to his two sons. Constantine, the elder, was a quiet, easy-going man, who found it quite too troublesome to dispute with the impetuous, quarrelsome Bertrand. So the younger soon became master of castle and lands and vassals to rule as he would.

Besides his love for fighting and his great skill and prowess in war, Bertrand also had the gift of song. He had always loved rhymes and music, and had often stood entranced as a little lad in his father's hall when some wandering minstrel sang of daring knights and their stirring adventures. His early resolve to be famous in all the three ways in which a gentleman of

## The Story of Bertrand de Born 57

Old Guienne might win distinction was faithfully kept ; and he became, as he wished, admired and feared as a soldier, renowned for his gay spirit in love, and accounted a wizard in moving men's hearts with his songs.

From his boyhood, instead of sitting tongue-tied when he was in company, or awkwardly muttering his duty-greeting, he had delighted in making some neat or pointed remark. This readiness in speech was a rather unusual gift amongst the haughty barons, and it would have won the troubadour-viscount affectionate admiration if it had not so often been used in a bitter and insulting way. Amongst the young nobles who were the friends and companions of Bertrand de Born was Prince Henry, the eldest son of the King of England. The lads saw much of each other, and Bertrand encouraged the young prince in all his ambitious plans. He gave him the nickname of "Seaman," on account of his journeys across the sea to his father's English dominions. Half affectionately and half in contempt he called Count Geoffrey and Count Richard, Prince Henry's brothers, "Rassa" and "Richard Ay-and-no." The fearless courage of the "Cœur-de-lion" no doubt won him this rather double-edged compliment.

Count Richard alone of the three seems to have shared Bertrand's love for music and song, but Prince Henry was his dearest friend. Together they hunted the wolf and the boar in the forests of Perigord, together they made daring assaults on the castles of unfriendly barons, and they vied with each other in their haughty and warlike bearing. Prince Henry's position as heir to the kingdom of England, as well as to the dukedoms of Aquitaine, Normandy and Anjou, had before it a more brilliant future than that of Bertrand. But, on the other hand, the poet possessed in his daring imagination and

ready speech a most unusual power of stirring the minds and hearts of all whom he addressed. He himself, we may be sure, would not have exchanged this for the privilege of "reigning" over large territories and accepting the unwilling homage and obedience of rebellious feudal barons. He delighted in rousing any noble to defiance of his superior, and in provoking them to insult and to make war upon each other.

Thus he was a firebrand in every company and had many enemies. "All day long I fight and am at work," he sings gaily in one of his songs. I make a thrust at my enemies and defend myself, for they lay waste my land, and burn my crops; they pull up my trees by the roots and mix my corn with the straw." When his own quarrels were avenged he would turn at once to provoking more. "Cowards and brave men alike are my enemies," he shouts defiantly. "I break up the leagues of the barons and sow hatred among them, then I reunite them and try to give them brave hearts and strong. But I am a fool for my trouble, for they are base mettle."

He pursued this plan with the three young princes, Henry, Richard and Geoffrey, making them discontented with their positions, and impatient to own and govern some of their father's dominions. To this they were already too much inclined from their babyhood, since their mother, formerly wife of the King of France, was most ambitious for them, and encouraged their boyish rebellions against their father's authority. Partly in the hope of peace, and partly to secure the throne to his heirs, King Henry had his eldest son crowned King of England when the lad was only fifteen years old. He did not, however, intend him to exercise any real power during his own lifetime; but the young prince was in no way inclined to be content with the mere ceremony.



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In this Bertrand de Born encouraged him, urging him to take his real place in some way, and always greeting him and speaking of him as "King." Two years later the ceremony of coronation was repeated in Normandy, and young Henry was permitted to exercise lordship over that province and Anjou.

Bertrand's taunts and gibes stirred Richard and Geoffrey to persist in claiming some similar dominions, and reluctantly King Henry made Richard Count of Aquitaine and Poitou, and Geoffrey Duke of Bretagne. He thought his youngest son, John, too young to need thus pacifying; but Bertrand's ready nickname, "Lackland," so rankled in the boy's mind, that soon his father made him lord of Ireland. Nevertheless, the scoffing title still clings to his name.

Either through jealousy or because of Bertrand's influence over the "Young King," Richard and the poet quarrelled furiously soon after Aquitaine and Poitou were given to him, and he supported Constantine de Born in an attempt he made to recover his rights. Bertrand's words of scorn and defiance reached farther even than his brilliant fighting; and from castle to castle travelled his minstrels, singing his war-songs and love-ditties and spirited verses, pouring contempt on all easy-going, indolent men like Constantine, his brother. "He knows not how to trot or gallop; he can neither thrust with lance nor shoot with arrow. He lives like a Lombard pedlar. When barons and knights seek glory at the wars, he stretches himself and yawns." As to Richard's share in the attempt, Bertrand thunders defiance and insult at his former friend: "I will come, I will come, myself! I, sitting upon my horse Bayard, will come, will come to Perigord! Well-armed will I come, and if I find this robber of Poitou, he shall know the cut of

my sword. His brow shall be decked with his blood and brains and the splinters from his helmet."

Later, when King Henry commanded Geoffrey and Richard to do homage to their elder brother as their feudal superior, they both refused, and to compel it the "Young King" invaded Aquitaine. In his army, at the head of a troop of the boldest and wildest soldiers, rode his friend Bertrand, accompanied by his favourite minstrel Papiol. Rapid marches and daring attacks, ravaged villages and burning castles, captured foes and treasure—all these made a succession of exciting events in which Bertrand gaily led, and which he recorded afterwards in his verses, and had them learnt and sung and published far and wide by his minstrels. Whenever there was a lull, and the barons led their troops homeward, Bertrand sighed furiously: "Why this peace? Would that the barons could be always at war with each other!" He pants for fresh quarrels, no matter what the subject. "There is peace everywhere!" he angrily begins one of his songs, "everywhere. I alone still retain a rag of warfare. May he be blind who seeks to take away my quarrel! What if I began it? Peace gives me no joy: war is my delight. This is my only law, no other have I: That on Monday I fight, or on Tuesday; any week, any month, any year! March be it or May: neither shall hinder me from doing damage to those who wrong me. Not a leathern strap shall any one take from me without my keen revenge."

It was to Bertrand's great disgust that presently the King of England himself interposed in the quarrel between his sons Henry and Richard and brought about peace. He hastened to Bretagne, and there stirred up Count Geoffrey to resent some real or fancied injury, inducing him to take up arms against Richard. All the

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barons of France took sides, and there was promise of a general and widespread war. Bertrand was delighted. He sings, "As soon as we arrive the Tournament shall begin! The Aragonese and the Catalans shall soon strew the ground. The pommels of their saddles shall not defend them, for our friends strike long blows. Truly the splinters shall fly up to heaven! The silk and samite shall be rent to shreds, the tents and the cots shall be alike shattered when we arrive!"

During the siege of Limoges the young King was seized with a fever, and, as he lay dying, sent a messenger to plead for his father's forgiveness. Though King Henry would not go to him in person, he sent a ring in token of pardon, and the young King passed away holding it to his lips. His friend Bertrand was stricken with sorrow, and in an elegy which he composed to his memory he sang,

"If all the pain, the griefs, the bitter tears,  
The sorrow, the remorse, the scornful slight,  
Of which man in this life the burden bears,  
Were thrown a-heap, the balance would be light  
Against the death of our young English King.  
Valour and youth stood wailing at his loss,  
The world is waste and dark and dolorous,  
Void of all joy, full of regret and sorrow.

. . . . .  
The world is base and dark and full of tears,  
Its love has fled, its pleasure passed away,  
A falsehood is its truth. Each day appears  
But to regret its better yesterday.  
Look up, ye all, to our young English King,  
The best among the brave and valorous!  
Now is his gentle heart afar from us,  
And we are left to our regret and sorrow."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Trans. by Francis Hueffer.

The monarch of England was not disposed to overlook the evil counsel which Bertrand had always given to his sons, so he set himself to outwit the poet-warrior, and, surrounding him suddenly in his castle, take him captive and kill him. After a long siege the castle fell, through the treachery of a friend of Bertrand's, and he was taken prisoner to King Henry's pavilion. According to the old story, "After the defenders could hold out no longer, and all were captured, Sir Bertrand, with his people and retainers, was brought to the tent of the King. And Henry, frowning upon him and shaking his head, said, "Bertrand, Bertrand ! you who boasted often that you never needed more than half your sense to meet any other man, know, now, that you stand in need of all your wits !"

And Bertrand replied, "Sire, it is true. Never have I needed all my wits to match any man."

Then said the King, "Methinks that now you have lost your wits altogether," and he bent upon him stern brows, whose frown had oft made sons and barons and bishops and knights to tremble. But Bertrand, sadly shaking his head, murmured, "Sire, it is true ! it is true ! I have indeed now lost my wits."

"And how is that ?" asked the King, expecting instant and ready submission.

"Sire," replied Bertrand, "on the day that your valiant young son Henry died, I lost sense and cunning."

Then the king, when he heard these words, wept for his son, and in his great griefs he presently could not contain himself and fainted. When he recovered he asked for Bertrand and said to him :—

"Sir Bertrand ! Sir Bertrand ! wise you are and right to say that you lost sense and cunning when my son died,

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for he loved you. He loved you better than any other man in the world ; wherefore, for his sake and for your love of him, I release you. I release your person, your lands and your castle, and you are my knight and my friend. In token whereof I give you these five hundred marks of silver for the hurt and damage of my war upon you."

And Bertrand knelt at the King's feet and offered him service.

So Bertrand de Born returned to his castle and allied himself strongly with the King of England, and with Count Richard whom he had formerly opposed. Some years later, in one of the frequent wars of the time, Richard was shut up in prison in Germany, and on his release Bertrand wrote a song of rejoicing : " I joy, I joy that prison holds the Cœur-de-lion no longer ! Now shall we see fortresses destroyed and towers overthrown and our enemies in chains, as Richard goes on his glorious wars ! "

Not that Bertrand, fighter as he was, thought of nothing but war. He was, as Dante tells us, the first poet to sing the sword and to praise the practice of arms in verse, " I cannot choose but utter a song " ; but also he did not neglect the troubadour's favourite subject, Love. Beyond this theme of fair ladies, he sang, too, of the beauty of the world in springtime, and the fresh cool winds and the high-arched sky. The strong castles of mediæval times were but gloomy places during the long, dark winter, and lovers of the open air waited impatiently for the coming of spring, when men might go forth abroad on adventure and pleasure. One of his songs begins,

" When the young blossoms of the spring appear,  
And paint the bushes pink and white and green,



Then in the sweetness of the new-born year  
I clothe my song ; at all times such has been  
The wont of birds, and as a bird am I." <sup>1</sup>

After the fashion of the knightly troubadours of the day, he had offered his services and allegiance to the Countess Matilda of Montignac, who, for her beauty and grace, had been sought in marriage by the noblest men of the time, including the crusading Count Richard, and Count Geoffrey of Bretagne, and King Alfonso of Aragon. She had held herself aloof from them all, but was gracious and kind to the poet, lord of Autafort, so that in his boasting fashion he sang how she "refused her favours to Poiton and Tolosa and Bretagne and Saragossa, but has granted them to the valorous poor knight de Born."

A few years later Bertrand announced himself as the devoted servant and champion of another Lady Matilda, sister of the dead Young King and Count Richard. Several songs of his remain which were composed in this lady's honour, including one written on a Sunday in camp while waiting for dinner, which had to be hunted or foraged before the meal could be served. He married neither of these ladies, however, but a sister of one of the most powerful Gascon barons, who brought him lands and castles. Through her influence the longstanding quarrel with his brother Constantine was ended. One of his sons, called Bertrand after himself, seems to have inherited something of his gay, daring spirit and his bright gifts of song. During the reign of King John ("Lackland") this Bertrand the younger wrote a vigorous and insulting song about him, saying that his losses were due to his own cowardice, and that the poet's one hope was that all vassals and subjects throughout his realm would hasten to rebel against so wretched a lord.

<sup>1</sup> Trans. by Francis Hueffer.



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By that time our Bertrand de Born had given up his active life of war, and the composing of gallant and martial verse, and had gone into a monastery. There this sometime daring adventurer spent the long, quiet days and nights in his narrow cell, or pacing the cloisters in his monk's habit to the services in the chapel. Hardly any murmur of the noisy, bustling world outside could reach him there; and we think of him as penitently learning the ways and words of peace, and seeking forgiveness for his turbulent stirring up of strife in past days.

Dante shows us Bertrand de Born not penitent, but remorseful, in the third of the outer circles of Hell amongst those of the deceitful in this world who gave evil counsel to others and caused strife. In the terrible words of the Divine Comedy,

“ I truly saw, and still I seem to see it,  
A trunk without a head walk in like manner  
As walked the others of the mournful herd.  
And by the hair it held the head dissevered,  
Hung from the hand in fashion of a lantern,  
And that upon us gazed and said : ‘ Woe’s me ! ’ ”

#### IV

## The Emperor Frederic II

### “Wonder of the World”

1194-1250

“Now by a secret pathway we proceed,  
Between the walls that hem the region round  
And the tormented souls. . . .  
My master, summoning me back,  
I heard ; and with more eager haste besought  
The spirit to inform me who with him  
Partook his lot. He answer thus return'd :  
' More than a thousand with me here are laid,  
Within is Frederic, second of that name.' . . .”

*Inferno x.*

THE Emperor Henry VI., son of the great Frederic Barbarossa, had, for political reasons, married the Princess Constance, daughter of King Ruggieri of Sicily. This lady, like so many of the women of great houses in those stormy times, had entered a convent, and desired to live peacefully there away from the magnificence and strife of courts. But it was not to be, and after some years' seclusion her marriage was arranged. She brought to her husband a splendid dowry, including the kingdom of Sicily ; but the Emperor was not able to enjoy peaceful sovereignty over it, as the Sicilian barons refused to acknow-

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ledge him, and elected one of their own number, Count Tancred, to occupy the throne.

So valiant a resistance did Sicily offer to the Emperor's armies, that once the Empress Constance herself was taken prisoner. Count Tancred chivalrously ordered her to be treated with great respect, and soon set her at liberty, without demanding a ransom. In the year 1194 Count Tancred died, of a broken heart it is said, through grief at the death of his eldest son Roger, and only then was the Emperor able to subdue the Sicilies. In the same year the Empress Constance had a little son, whom his parents named Frederic, after his illustrious grandfather, Barbarossa. The boy was destined to a great future, and it was noticed that very early he showed a fancy for military things. When he was only four years old his father died, and though it had been arranged that the prince should succeed him, his brother Philip meanly but successfully claimed the Imperial throne. Little Frederic was, however, crowned King of the Romans, and lived with his widowed mother at Palermo for some years.

He was a bright, handsome lad, full of vigour and spirit, and quick at learning. He was soon able to sing and recite songs and stories of adventure, and he listened eagerly to the histories of monarchs and rulers of the past. The Sicilian peoples were proud of the boy-king, and readily supported him when, at the age of sixteen, his Uncle Philip being dead, he claimed the throne of Germany. The Pope gave him his blessing, and disowned the rival claimant, Otho IV., wherefore his allies fell away from him, and Frederic was crowned at Aachen. He was not yet, however, undisputed sovereign of all four parts of his Empire, which consisted of Germany, Burgundy, Lombardy and Sicily; for neither

Ghibellines nor Guelfs in the powerful Lombard towns were satisfied with an Emperor favoured by the Pope.

It had been the custom for four separate coronations to take place, and we are told that the different crowns used signified the nature of the realm. The German crown was silver ; the Lombard, iron ; the Roman, gold ; and the Imperial title was not considered to be fully held until the Emperor had been crowned by the Pope at Rome. The Pope at this time was greatly concerned in strengthening the temporal power of the Church, and delayed the coronation of a monarch who coveted sole power as did Frederic. He exacted a promise that the Emperor would go on a crusade. Frederic gave this unwillingly and afterwards broke it. Although he was very energetic at times, he loved ease and luxury too ; and a distant campaign which, even if successful, meant sharing the glory with others, was not attractive enough to win him from his Sicilian palaces. There he kept greater state and magnificence than had ever been known before. Splendid entertainments, jousts and courts of love, processions and pageants, filled the sunny hours. At the court were welcomed travellers of all nations, poets and troubadours, wonder-workers and scholars, men of learning and diplomacy, courtly monks and polished cardinals ; and all found the young Emperor courteous, condescending, able and interesting.

He encouraged the study of science which, in mediæval times, was closely allied with magic ; and welcomed at his court, not only Albertus Magnus, but also the wizard Michael Scot. This wonder-worker and magician dedicated to the Emperor one of his books on Natural History and Astrology. He is celebrated in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* as,



THE COURT OF FREDERIC II





“ A wizard of much dreaded fame  
That when in Salamanca's cave,  
Him listed magic wand to wave,  
The bells would ring in Notre Dame.”

He was said to have a familiar spirit whom it was necessary to keep employed, but who got through the tasks given him so quickly that it was difficult to find enough for him to do. Sir Michael set him to build a dam across the Tweed, and it was done in a night : he then charged him to divide Eildon Hill into three parts, and this also was completed by morning. Then the magician posed him by requiring him to make ropes of sea-sand, and this task kept him employed ever after.

While Michael Scot was at the Court of the Emperor his royal patron desired to test his power. So he asked him the favourite question in early measurements : “ How far am I from the sky ? ” The wizard gave him an answer, and then Frederic ordered him to attend him for some months in a progress about his dominions, commanding that during their absence the whole foundations of the Royal palace at Palermo should be lowered several feet, and everything restored as before. On their return Frederic repeated his question, and the answer given by Sir Michael differed by some feet from his earlier one. This convinced the Emperor that his astrological knowledge was profound, and that his words were true.

He also encouraged the Arabian necromancers who travelled from Baghdad to Cordova, and extended to them hospitality in his palaces and protection throughout his dominions. Thus he displeased the Church authorities, who hated and feared the Black Arts of the infidels. But Frederic only laughed at grave admonitions from bishops and abbots ; he treated them hospitably, but derided their message. He kept up the magnificent and

barbaric state of an Eastern Sultan, rather than that of a Christian monarch, with a regiment of Moorish soldiers for his Palace Guards, and revelled in ease and luxury and extravagant pleasures. Like most kings who have enjoyed absolute power over their subjects, he had little regard for the rights, or even the lives, of people who might in any way be useful to him. Terrible stories remain of the experiments which he was fond of making, desiring, as he said, to find out the secrets of science. There was a wonderful diver in Sicily who could dive so deep and so frequently that he was nicknamed "Nicholas the Fish," and after he had dived to the bottom of Charybdis and brought up the Emperor's golden crown, Frederic insisted that he must be able to live as well in the water as out of it. He then mischievously cast his crown in a second time, commanding Nicholas to fetch it. This time, his powers spent, the poor diver was drowned, and the Emperor professed himself satisfied that Nicholas had, after all, been designed to live on dry land.

Because none of his wise magicians or devout churchmen could show him the soul of a man he said he must assume that there was none, but desired to try an experiment. He ordered that a man who was convinced that he had a soul should be imprisoned in a cask, and visited after five days. Of course the poor victim was dead, and Frederic declared himself unable to see anything but a body. At one time he was much interested in speech and languages generally, and determined to find out if children would by nature speak the tongue of the land in which they were born. So he ordered that a certain number of little babies should be brought up without being talked to; they were to be well-fed, cared for, and protected, but not to hear human speech. In

most cases the foster-mothers who had charge of the infants could not refrain from tender words and gentle songs. In some few cases, where they were sufficiently stern to do so, the little things languished and pined away.

Frederic desired to behave as though he were too lofty and magnanimous to take offence at anything that a mere subject might say, but occasionally he was betrayed into showing the really savage cruelty which lay beneath his gay and careless manner. He ordered a notary's right thumb to be struck off, because, in copying a decree, he had spelt the Emperor's name *Fredericus* instead of *Fridericus*, which he preferred.

When men were condemned for treachery Frederic ordered them to be wrapped in leaden cloaks and flung into a heated cauldron. Yet sometimes his sense of amusement would get the better of his instinct to be cruel, and he was especially appreciative of a quick retort or a clever speech. A favourite jester at the court was a hunchback, and the Emperor one day smote his hand cheerily on the hump, and said jestingly, "Ah! Dallio, my lord Dallio, when will this box be opened?" The ready-witted buffoon replied, "I doubt me, Sire, if ever: for I lost the key at Victoria." This daring reference to the Imperial defeat at Parma, where the Emperor had boastfully named his trenches *Victoria* in anticipation, might have cost the poor hunchback his head. But Frederic gave a great shout of laughter and strode away humming a hunting-song.

Amongst the many wanderers received with honour at the Emperor's Court, whether at Palermo among the orange-glades, or at solemn, frowning Aachen, or at Milan, or at Arles, were the Troubadours, who commemorated gallant and daring deeds of the past, and stimulated knights and gentlemen to high adventure in

love or in war. Amongst them were the famous Sordello and the gay, truculent, Bertrand de Born. Frederic seems to have admired this poet-baron immensely, and often professed himself desirous rather to shine as a poet and musician than as a ruler.

With the accession of a new Pope, in the year 1220, the Emperor's coronation at Rome had taken place amidst universal rejoicing. His journey from Palermo to Rome was a continuous triumphal procession, all towns on the route vying with each other for the honour of entertaining the sovereign and his stately retinue. Wherever he stayed, dignities were conferred and commemorative works put in hand. Florence was one of these favoured cities on the Emperor's way to Rome, but to her mortification he returned by another road. The Tuscan cities welcomed or dreaded his approach according to whether their sentiments were predominantly Ghibelline or Guelfic; Genoa and Pisa were always Imperialist, Parma and Cremona were Guelfic.

The ceremony at Rome was one of imposing magnificence. Representatives from all the states and cities of the Emperor's dominions attended. Counts and Barons and Prelates and Ecclesiastics thronged the narrow streets with their dazzling retinues; and in the Basilica, as the Pope placed the double crown on that handsome proud head, a mighty shout of "Ave!" went up in joyful acclamation from the assembled magnates.

The Emperor reigned for thirty years after this, but his sovereignty over some parts of his Empire was hardly maintained. In Sicily he was undisputed and supreme, but he met with much opposition in Germany from the native princes. To control and pacify them he had to grant them privileges which their successors were able



to turn against the throne ; in much the same way as in our own history King Edward III. in his creation of Dukes paved the way for the Wars of the Roses. Unlike the great Countess Matilda in her method of governance, he paid little heed and showed little favour to the German towns, which were soon to become a powerful element in the state.

In Italy, the Guelfic cities found it hard to reconcile allegiance to an Emperor who was perpetually at enmity with the Popes, with their own loyalty to the Roman See ; and it was partly to check this disaffection, and partly to make real his claim to be King of Jerusalem in right of his wife, that Frederic, eight years after his coronation, undertook the promised Crusade. He set off at the head of a great army, and it is recorded of him that he was unfavourably impressed by the natural features of the “ land flowing with milk and honey ” of Sacred Writ. With characteristic irreverence he announced scoffingly that if the Almighty had cast His eye over his inheritance, the Sicilies, He would certainly have planted His chosen people there.

The Crusade was so far successful that the Emperor was crowned King of Jerusalem, though it was by treaty with the Egyptian Sultan and not by conquest of the infidel. But the arrangement moved only the displeasure of the Pope, and Frederic was excommunicated for being at Jerusalem. Besides this, a Count was named by the Papal See as suzerain of the Emperor's Sicilian dominions, and established with a royal Court at Naples. To this disturbed state of things Frederic returned, prepared to defy the Pope and any other hostile power, and confident in his determination to assert his authority.

As the years passed the strife became more bitter between Pope and Emperor ; but Frederic, unlike our

Angevin King John, so far from trembling at the Papal displeasure, openly jested with his courtiers at the attempt of the Pope to absolve his subjects from their allegiance. It must be acknowledged that, except in the case of the strongly Guelfic cities, his confidence was justified ; and he undertook to compel peace in Italy by exacting hostages from both Ghibellines and Guelfs, whose lives were to be forfeit if bloodshed occurred in the towns. He spoilt this apparently impartial measure by releasing the Ghibellines after a brief period and imprisoning the Guelfs in gloomy dungeons of great fortresses. Many Florentines were thus kept for years in the terrible tower of San Miniato. His encouragement of the great Ghibelline nobles, such as the Uberti, led to civil war in every town where sympathies were divided. When Dante's father was a young man there was nothing less than a Reign of Terror in Florence. All ordinary life and pursuits were at a standstill ; houses were barricaded ; towers bristled with weapons ; armed bands roamed the streets ; sad funeral processions were scattered by rough men-at-arms ; and quiet, home-loving burgesses were driven mad with grief and despair.

Young Frederic, King of Antioch, a favourite son of the Emperor, invaded Florence with an army of German horsemen to ensure an Imperial triumph. The Emperor himself, at Pisa, was collecting troops and at Genoa a fleet, with which to subdue all Guelfic territory. From Pisa he moved on to besiege Parma, which held true to the Papacy, and he used every device to overcome the resistance offered to him. An old writer <sup>1</sup> says, " The Emperor caused castles of wood to be made when he sat down outside Brescia, and in those castles he placed the captives he had taken. But the besieged fired their

<sup>1</sup> Salimbene.



mangonels at the said castles with no hurt to the prisoners within ; also they hung up any of the Emperor's men they could catch by the arms outside the town walls." The two most violent and powerful Ghibelline barons of N. Italy were the Counts Ezzelino and Alberigo, and they dealt death and destruction wherever they went. "On one day Ezzelino caused 11,000 men of Padua to be burnt in the field of S. George in Verona whither they had been driven as captives." With Parma and Modena, the town of Reggio <sup>1</sup> was heavily visited by the enraged Emperor. The same chronicler says, "Every morning came the Emperor with his men and beheaded three or four, or as many more as seemed good to him, of the men of Parma and Modena and Reggio who were of the Church party, whom he kept in bonds. This did he on the shingles by the riverside within sight of the men of Parma that he might vex their souls." After some terrible details he goes on, "He sent the Lord Gerardo di Canale into Apulia, and caused him to be drowned in the depths of the sea with a mill-stone about his neck ; and yet he had been at first one of his nearest friends and had held many offices from him. And the Emperor's one ground of suspicion of him was that the tower of his palace in Parma had not been demolished as had others, and the materials used to build Ghibelline fortresses. Frederic would say to him jestingly, "The men of Parma love you and me much, my Lord Gerard ; for they have not destroyed your tower nor my palace on the Arena."

The Emperor's evil mood grew upon him as the stress and strife continued, and the deep-seated cruelty of his heart manifested itself continually. Lord Bernard Rossi of Parma, riding with him one day, was nearly thrown by his horse stumbling. The Emperor frowned darkly,

<sup>1</sup> Destroyed by earthquake, January 1909.

and said in a grim voice, "My Lord Bernard, you have an evil horse. But I hope within a few days to give you a better, one which shall be safe and not stumble." And Lord Bernard understood him to speak of the gallows, which he did, and a little later he carried out his threat. The old writer says sadly, "Yet Lord Bernard was the Emperor's gossip and most intimate friend." But the Emperor could keep no man's friendship. His own cynical description of his treatment of those who served him describes his feeling: "I never nourished a pig but at last I had its grease."

This spirit of selfishness and suspicion led him at length to doubt his trusted friend and secretary, Ser Pietro delle Vigne. This scholar, himself a poet and man of letters, had been the Emperor's companion in many a progress and peaceful contest in arms or verse; had aided him in his great schemes for his Empire; travelling, arranging, writing, recording, and everywhere giving loyal and competent help. Jealous whisperers accused delle Vigne of private communications with the Pope, or with powerful Cardinals, and Frederic listened with ready suspicion. After the final defeat at Parma, when the desperate inhabitants marched out of the city, nobles and knights and burghers side by side, and even their very women and girls, and drove the Emperor's force, horse and foot, from his arrogantly named "Victoria" trenches, the angry spirit of the defeated monarch sought to find vent somewhere. His wrath fell upon his secretary: suddenly the records of the Emperor's camp, in that fair, neat penmanship, cease, and none know what has become of the once trusted Pietro.

Popular rumour had its solution, and the story went that as he stood in attendance on his royal master while the physician presented the Emperor with his morning

draught, the monarch bent a searching glance upon his secretary, saying, "My friend, art thou sure that this is medicine, not poison?" The physician offered to take back the cup, and the Emperor commanded him to drink it off. He flung himself at his master's feet, and, in so doing, upset the medicine. Later in the day the remains were given to some prisoners condemned to death, and they died in agony after a few hours. The Emperor was convinced that the physician was a tool in the hands of Pietro delle Vigne, and that his once trusted secretary and poet-companion was compassing his death. Wherefore he ordered that Pietro should be ignominiously hurried to the dungeon of a fortress and there imprisoned in fetters. Tradition said that he killed himself in his cell to avoid further indignities; thus Dante shows us Pietro delle Vigne in the Seventh Circle of Hell amongst those who had done violence on themselves. His spirit relates

" I it was who held  
Both keys to Frederic's heart and turn'd the wards,  
Opening and shutting, with a skill so sweet  
That besides me, into his inmost breast  
Scarce any other could admittance find.  
The faith I bore to my high charge was such,  
It cost me the life-blood that warm'd my veins.  
Then Envy who ne'er turned her gloating eyes  
From Cæsar's household, common vice and pest  
Of courts, 'gainst me inflamed the minds of all;  
And to Augustus they so spread the flame  
That my glad honours changed to bitter woes.  
My soul, disdainful and disgusted, sought  
Refuge in death from scorn, and I became,  
Just as I was, unjust toward myself."

The bitter and revengeful spirit of the Emperor during the last five years of his reign is described as that of a "bear robbed of her whelps." Another king had been

proposed for election in Germany ; Lombardy was almost independent of the Empire ; the Guelfs were restless and determined throughout Italy ; and though to them the Emperor seemed indeed “ a bird whose wing-feathers have been plucked away,” because he was under the ban of the Church, yet the undaunted monarch, no longer gay and confident, but resolute and dogged, persisted in his war with the Papacy. It was said that in the defeat before Parma, the Emperor lost all his pavilions and chests of treasures, including the Imperial ornaments and even the jewelled crown.

Perhaps he might have stood out against open enemies, however powerful, against even the Church, whose adherents believed him to be anti-Christ, but the dissensions in his own family and between his many sons made his last years miserable. His wife was Countess of Boulogne in her own right, and her son Conradine was to succeed Frederic in Germany and in the Sicilies ; but it did not promise well for the future that young Conradine’s half-brothers were far more vigorous and able than himself. Besides this, they had already held “ kingdoms ” and dukedoms in various parts of the Empire, which they ruled with only shadowy submission to their father. Chief amongst them was the Emperor’s darling son Manfred, brilliant, audacious, and resembling his father more than did any of his brothers, including even Frederic who was named after him. They had one sister, Constance ; and she was given in marriage to King Peter of Aragon.

History records that the great Emperor met his death by the order, if not at the hands, of his favourite son, Manfred ; and young Conradine, though he succeeded to the throne, had a troubled reign of only a few years.

Dante's representation of Frederic takes into account his many faults and the evil he had done, with almost Biblical simplicity ; and shows us nothing of the attractive personality of his earlier years. In a wide and terrible plain, covered with burning sepulchres, described as the Sixth Circle of Hell, are the fiery tombs of the Heretics. The lids are raised, and Dante and his guide Virgil can distinguish some of the tortured forms, of whom more than a thousand were there, of many climes and many ages, companions in misery of the illustrious Frederic, Third and last of the Suabian Emperors.



V

Ser Brunetto Latini

1220-1294

“ ‘ If my entreaty wholly were fulfilled,’  
 Replied I to him, ‘ not yet would you be  
 In banishment from human nature placed ;  
 For in my mind is fixed, and touches now  
 My heart, the dear and good paternal image  
 Of you, when in the world from hour to hour,  
 You taught me how a man becomes eternal ;  
 And how much I am grateful, while I live  
 Behoves that in my language be discerned.’ ”

*Inferno xv.*

ONE of the greatest Florentines of the thirteenth century was Ser Brunetto, of the family of the Latini. He was born in 1220, the year of the Coronation of the Emperor Frederic II., in which the smouldering rivalry of the cities of Pisa and Florence broke into open flame. A story which illustrates the ill-feeling between the two towns is told by Brunetto Latini in the “Chronicles of Florence,” which he translated and edited. One of the Florentine ambassadors, entertained by a Cardinal during the Coronation festivities, admired a dog and begged it of his host as a gift. It was promised with gracious readiness. The next day the same Cardinal was feasting a Pisan ambassador, who also admired the beautiful animal, and, with courtly desire



to please, the Cardinal promised that the dog should be his. The Florentine, who had been the first to receive the promise, soon sent for the animal ; and when, a little later, the Pisan also sent, the disappointment was magnified into resentment of an insult ; and not only were the ambassadors and their retinues set at enmity, but also all the Pisans and the Florentines in Rome at the time.

The Florence in which the gifted young Brunetto grew up was just beginning to show the fine buildings and imposing spaces for which the city was afterwards so famous. Only a few of the houses of Old Florence were left, the last great fire of 1207 having burnt down nearly all that remained of the shingle-roofed and straw-thatched houses built of timber. A second bridge, the Ponte alla Carraia, was being built over the Arno ; and the new streets were being paved with small stones instead of bricks. Many of the palaces of the *grandi*, or aristocratic families, had high towers and turrets, and stood around spacious courtyards. A few were solidly built, like fortresses ; for it was the policy of the democratic government of Florence to require even nobles to live within the city, and to become members of one of the Greater Guilds. One of the most commanding and roomy of the newer buildings was the Hospital of S. Maria sopr' Arno, a house of charity and refuge for the aged and friendless—not, as would now be understood, a place for the tending of the sick. In these hospitals the pilgrims and travellers of the Middle Ages found entertainment, and one was attached to every large abbey or monastery. Fifty years later another hospital was built by the benevolent and gentle Folco Portinari, the father of Dante's ideal lady Beatrice.

In that simple age the expenses of life were few, so

that men who were moved to spend their wealth usually devoted it to building churches. Two, which were afterwards to be noted as landmarks in Florence, were being erected when Brunetto was a lad ; and there began to be planned the new Mansion House, or Palace of the *podestà*. It was a gay and lively city, growing in wealth, and noted for the enterprise of its citizens ; very martial, too, in spirit, and strongly Guelf in sympathies. Like London, in the old days before a standing army, all able-bodied men were drafted into train-bands, and drilled to use some weapon of defence, and to march to battle. The six divisions of the city had each their military company, and to each was attached a certain number of men from the villages round. The tolling of the great city bell was the signal for each civic corps to rally behind its own banner, or "Gonfalon," and march to the central square. On occasions of real war, as that of the memorable attack on Sienna, there went before the moving army the Carroccio, with the "Captain of the People" in command. This was a great vermilion-painted car, drawn by beautiful oxen, and bearing the Florentine standard. To the staff was fixed a crucifix, and at the top was a golden ball ; on platforms upon the car rode the escort and a band of musicians. Twice at least may young Latini have seen this car leave the city-gates and return with a victorious army, but in the disastrous battle of Montaperti it was seized by the conquerors, and the proud Florentine banner was hung in Sienna Cathedral.

Although the city was growing in wealth, but little money was spent on luxurious food or fine clothes. The men wore leathern garments, with heavy boots and long cloth caps ; the women, a long serge or camlet tunic of crimson, girt about the waist with a worked leather belt, with a hooded cloak lined with miniver. Women



THE CARROCCIO



of the poorer classes wore a similar garment of green cloth. Wooden trenchers were used at table, and few families possessed more than two or three cups or goblets. Poor families at table would all eat from the same dish ; amongst the wealthier there would be a principal dish for the man and his wife, and the rest would share from another. Candles were unknown, so that servants held lanterns or torches to light the table. The meat was usually served in a stew, and could be afforded by the poorer people only two or three times a week ; the bread was coarse and eaten stale. Gold or silver ornaments, and jewellery, were almost unknown ; and the extravagance of men showed itself chiefly in fine horses, or rich armour and weapons. The interiors of the houses were dark and gloomy, for the windows were small, and almost the only decoration was heavy carved panels. The treasures of the household were mostly arms or accoutrements for war, with occasionally metal sconces and lanterns, and massive timber chests. But here and there a family possessed two or three books, in beautiful black letter writing on thick discoloured parchment, bound in metal-cornered covers of embossed leather.

Little Brunetto Latini lived in a home such as this, and early showed a love for books and learning. According to the method of education of the time, a lad, as soon as he knew his letters, and could read simple words, began his studies with the " Trivio," consisting of grammar (*i.e.* Latin), rhetoric, and dialectics or logic. Promising students went on to the " Quadrivio," arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy ; and as Brunetto was one of the finest scholars of Florence we may think of him as pursuing these studies till well on into manhood. Nor was he content to learn from books, merely ; he, like his future pupil, Dante Alighieri, was a close ob-



server of nature and of men. Thus we find him early drawn to history, and in that age the writing of history had hardly been begun. Of the few scholars who attempted it we know little, except the magnificence of their aim; it was usually nothing less than to give the history of the world from its beginning down to their own day.

One such, who wrote in the middle of the thirteenth century, was a Dominican monk of Troppau, whose record, in Latin, consisted of a series of Chronicles arranged under the headings of the Emperors and Popes through the ages. The city of Florence became possessed of some copies of this work, and Brunetto Latini was the scholar who translated it into Tuscan. He also arranged, in a separate treatise, that part of it which related to Florence; and he is believed, either in his official capacity as Notary, or from love of the subject, to have kept the Florentine records up to date for some years. His translation and his original work were of such value that they formed part of the chief historical papers in the archives of Florence, and later chroniclers were proud to credit his name with their labours. But Latini was not only a translator and writer of records, he also undertook other and more ambitious work.

In the European revival of learning of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the leading idea of the time was the unity, or oneness, of knowledge. Thus every branch of learning was closely related to every other branch, and, instead of dwelling upon the differences in the various subjects, scholars were always seeking to point out the likenesses. And always they sought to connect the external world with the world of thought; thus Dante expressly states in his "Convito" that the Sun, Moon and Planets resemble the seven sciences which are the



roads into all truth. So, Brunetto Latini, after his commentary on Tully's Rhetoric, wrote a long philosophical poem, which he called "Tesoretto," giving, in the form of a Vision, the adventures of a supposed Florentine ambassador. He, "returning from an embassy to King Alphonso of Spain, meets on the plain of Roncesvalles a student of Bologna, riding on a bay mule, who informs him that the Guelfs have been banished from Florence." Plunged into sorrowful meditation, the story-teller loses the highroad and wanders in a wondrous forest. Here he meets the august and wonderful figure of Nature, who tells him "how the world was created, and gives him a banner to protect him on his way through the forest. Farther on he meets the Virtues and the Vices, Philosophy, Fortune, Ovid and Cupid, and his descriptions of these fill many cantos. On leaving the forest he visits the monastery of Montpelier, and is then wafted to the top of Mount Olympus, where he meets the great Ptolemy, and discourses to him of the Beginnings of all things."

This poem is written in a brisk, lively metre, which is apparent to one with but little knowledge of Italian:—

" Più me pareva selvaggio.  
Quivi non ha viaggio,  
Quivi non ha persone.  
Quivi non ha magione  
Non bestia, non uccello,  
Non flume, non ruscello.  
Non formica, nè mosca,  
Nè cosa, ch' i' conosca.  
E io pensando forte  
Dottai ben della morte."<sup>1</sup>

To Brunetto Latini, however, writing was but one of

<sup>1</sup> TESORETTO. Brunetto Latini. Quoted from Cary's "Dante."

the pursuits of his life. He held an important position in the government of Florence, and also instructed young men in the more advanced subjects of study and in the art of verse. In the year 1250, when the Emperor Frederic II. died, the Guelf party in Florence seized the opportunity to demand a complete reorganisation of the affairs of the city. Two great meetings of the people were held in the churches of San Firenze and Santa Croce, and the division into Ghibelline and Guelf was condemned as unpatriotic, while a new and more popular method of government was demanded. Although Florence had far fewer nobles within her bounds than most of the Italian cities, those there were belonged almost entirely to the Ghibellines; so that the new popular control greatly lessened the power of the aristocratic supporters of the Emperor. In all these troublous matters Ser Brunetto Latini took a prominent part, being a member of an old and respected family, a noted scholar, and an able and persuasive orator. He was a member of the Great Council, and was more than once commissioned to go as envoy to other cities in order to establish commercial treaties, as for instance to Orvieto and Genoa. This was the beginning of the prosperous and militant independence of Florence. Besides the civil governor, or *podestà*, there was also a military commander, with the imposing titles of "Defender of the Guilds and the People," "Captain of all the Guelfs," etc. The palace of the *podestà* was completed with magnificence for those days, and a third bridge built over the Arno, the Santa Trinità. The private citizen, by whose munificence this was chiefly done, may have been Latini himself. Two satirical poems, largely political, censuring, or scoffing at, Florentine shortcomings, are supposed to belong to this part of his life.

A story is told of him which shows his professional pride in his calling as Notary, or lawyer. He made a mistake in drawing up a contract, and through the discontent of one of the parties in the case, he was accused of fraud. He preferred to be thought guilty of this rather than of negligence, and was convicted of the offence, and heavily fined.

In 1260 when, through the Florentine defeat at Sienna, the city was occupied by Count Giordano and his German troops, the Ghibelline party again triumphed, and all the leading Guelfs were banished. Amongst them was the haughty notary, Brunetto Latini; and after wandering through some of the cities of Italy, he took refuge in Paris. There he consoled himself in his exile by writing a book, called the "Tesoro," which exactly illustrates the ideas of the time as to learning generally. It consists of the stories of the ancient world as recorded in the Bible and classical mythology; astronomy, or the study of the celestial spheres; geography and natural philosophy; history and metaphysics; a compendium of Aristotle; and discussions on morality, rhetoric, and civil government. This was written in French, and, in the easy manner of old-time authors with their little circle of readers, Brunetto in his preface observes: "If any one ask why this book is written in the French language since we are of Italy, I will answer that it is for two things: one because we are in France, and the other because the French tongue is more agreeable and more common than all the other languages." A few quotations from this curious old book will show how highly its author esteemed learning: "The smallest part of this Treasure is like unto ready money, to be expended daily in things needful; that is, it treats of the beginning of time, of the antiquity of old histories, of the creation of the world,

and, in fine, of the nature of all things. . . . The second part, which treats of the vices and virtues, is of precious stones, which give unto man delight and virtue : that is to say, what things a man should do and what he should not, and shows the reason why. . . . The third part is of fine gold ; that is to say, it teaches a man to speak according to the rules of rhetoric, and how a ruler ought to govern those beneath him. . . . And I say not that this book is extracted from my own poor sense and my own naked knowledge, but, on the contrary, it is like an honeycomb gathered from divers flowers." In the historical part of the book he writes, " The Romans besieged Fiesole till at last they conquered it. Then they built upon the plain which is at the foot of the high rocks on which that city stood another city that is now called Florence. The spot of ground where Florence stands was formerly called The House of Mars, for Mars, who is one of the seven planets, is called the god of War. Therefore it is no wonder that the Florentines are always in war and in discord, for that planet reigns over them. Of this, Ser Brunetto Latini ought to know the truth, for he was born there, and was in exile when he composed this book."

For thirty years Latini lived in exile, and then the decay of the Ghibelline power in Florence made it possible for him to return. But a new order of things was established there, and the ingratitude of forgetfulness was all that awaited him. Four years later he died, and was buried in the Church of S. Maria Maggiore. Dante describes his meeting with his tutor, revered and loved in life, in the Second Circle of the Inferno, where those souls who were actuated by low motives and base desires in this life endure the painful penalty. He explains who are his companions,

“ All of them were clerks,  
And men of letters great and of great fame  
In the world tainted with the self-same sin,”

apparently the sin of Knowledge without Reverence. Dante describes it as Brutishness, a form of Malice or Vice, which leads its followers to know what is good and to choose what is evil ; to be self-pleasers and lovers of ease and softness, rejecting all discipline and restraint. History records many instances of men of high powers and great public influence who lived evil private lives, and thus brought scandal upon the community to which they belonged ; and Dante shows the gifted Florentine gentleman such an one as those.

Ser Brunetto listens to Dante's pained protest at seeing him in so sad and evil a place ;

“ Now strikes full upon my heart,  
The dear, benign, paternal image, such  
As thine was, when so lately thou didst teach me  
The way for man to win Eternity :  
And how I prized the lesson, it behoves  
That, long as life endures, my tongue should speak,”

and his last words to Dante are—

“ Commended unto thee be my Tesoro  
In which I still live ; and no more I ask.”

*Inferno xv.*



## VI

### Count Ugolino of Pisa

1230-1288

“ Amid the desolation of a city,  
Which was the cradle and is now the grave  
Of an extinguished people ; so that pity  
Weeps o’er the shipwrecks of oblivion’s wave.  
There stands the Tower of Famine. It is built  
Upon some prison-homes, whose dwellers rave  
For bread, and gold, and blood.”

SHELLEY.

**T**RAVELLERS in Pisa are still shown the remains of an ancient Tower once called the “ Tower of the Seven Ways,” but, since the grim vengeance of Archbishop Ruggiero in 1288, known as the “ Tower of Famine.” The victims were Count Ugolino della Gherardesca, his two sons, and his two young grandsons. Like most of the chief Italian towns in the thirteenth century Pisa had its two great political parties of Guelf and Ghibelline, and in 1275, when the Guelfic League was formed, many banished Guelfs of Pisa, including Count Ugolino, made alliance with Florence against their native city, and even fought in the army of the League against it. The Pisans were defeated, and one of the conditions exacted by the Florentines was the recall of the banished Guelfs and their due share in positions of authority restored to them.



This was granted, and for a few years Pisa was free from war and in alliance with Florence developed great prosperity. It was always to the commercial interest of these cities to be friendly, since Pisa commanded the Sea and thus could help or hinder foreign trade, whilst Florence was most energetic and skilful in devising new and good methods of preparing merchandise.

With the growing wealth of Pisa her people adopted habits of luxury and extravagance hitherto unknown. The various nobles of the city kept their little courts of men-at-arms and retainers, and encouraged display in dress and show and state in amusements. Horsemanship and sword exercises were in great favour; and a kind of tournament, copied from the Saracens, kept the young cavaliers and their followers very well amused when there was no more interesting matter—as personal quarrels and fighting—on hand. In the “*Armeggiatori*,” as these contests were called, the opposing sides were mounted on prancing steeds elaborately saddled, wearing gay uniforms and light-coloured mantles; and, riding with very short stirrups, they stood erect as they met in the charge, and broke lances at terrific speed. But very often real quarrels broke out, as, indeed, was always the case where nobles with great bodies of retainers living at ease were concerned; and much of the time of the Pisan magistrates and senate was occupied in adjusting them, or in exacting penalties for riot and murder.

Then there broke out the always smouldering rivalry of Genoa, and the Pisans had to send a fleet to protect the approaches to their harbours. Also a vassal governor of theirs, who was Prince of Corsica, suddenly transferred his allegiance to the Genoese, and ships and men had to be sent there to subdue the revolt. Then preparations were made for a great naval battle, each city

determining to reduce the other completely. The Pisans equipped three squadrons of ships, the second being under the command of Count Ugolino della Gherardesca ; and the Archbishop, attended by all the clergy and trains of monks and choristers, followed the Banner of the City down to the Ponte Vecchio near the harbour and blessed the fleet. Whilst the ceremony was going on the Crucifix attached to the staff fell to the ground, and the onlookers could but fear that such an omen foreboded ill. Surely enough, through a clever stratagem of the Genoese, the Pisan fleet was soon worsted, and the standard on the flag-ship fell with a crash, wounding the Admiral, Count Morosini, grievously. At that moment Count Ugolino, instead of supporting the first squadron, gave the signal for flight ; and sinking a few galleys and capturing many, the Genoese completely defeated their foe. The immense destruction and the number of prisoners taken gave rise to a bitter proverb : " If you would see Pisa you must go to Genoa."

The next we hear of Count Ugolino is at the time of the treaty between Florence, Lucca and Genoa, at which Ser Brunetto Latini was present, when it was proposed that the leading men of Pisa should be admitted to the citizenship of Genoa on condition that they disowned their old allegiance. But the people of Pisa had made the Count *podestà* of their city, and trusted to him to restore their fallen fortunes, since he was known to be more Guelf than Ghibelline, and hence perhaps able to influence Florence on their side against Genoa. In this supreme position Ugolino allowed his ambition to override his sense of justice ; and, lest the presence of his fellow-nobles should hinder him, he made no attempt to induce the Genoese to set free their Pisan prisoners. Also his haughty manners and jealous exercise of power

set his nephew, Nino Visconti, against him ; and for a short time he was driven from the palace of the Signory. The Archbishop, who was Ghibelline in sympathies, took sides with Nino, and there was civil war in the city, during which Ugolino and his opponents in turn seized the public palace, and endeavoured to rule from there. The people were in a miserable state ; food was so dear that many were starving in the city ; yet the Count, in his armed security in tower or palace, knew and thought nothing of it. The one thing upon which he was determined was to be supreme in Pisa. When a magistrate one day demanded an audience of him, and urged him because of the great dearth to suspend the customs duties on food, he was so angered that he stabbed him in the arm with his poniard. A noble in attendance sprang forward to shield the wounded man, and Count Ugolino seized an axe which lay near and smote the intruder one furious blow which laid him dead at his feet.

The Count's self-seeking and tyranny, no less than the determination of Archbishop Ruggiero to bring about his overthrow, hastened the end. When, in the summer of 1288 the Council of the Republic met in the church of San Sebastian to consider terms of peace with Genoa, Ugolino thwarted every proposal and endeavoured to bring fresh bitterness into the discussion. Then, suddenly, the Archbishop's supporters of the famous houses of Sismondi and Lanfranchi attacked the Count and his party ; and, after a desperate encounter in the market-place, in which one of his sons was killed before his eyes, he took refuge with his two younger sons and his grandsons in the public palace. His opponents besieged it till nightfall, and then threatened to set it on fire, thus compelling the defenders to submit. They

were imprisoned in the "Tower of the Seven Ways," belonging to the Ghibelline house of the Gualandi, and, after some months, by the orders of Archbishop Ruggiero, the key of the Tower was thrown into the Arno, and the prisoners left to die of starvation. Chaucer in his "Monk's Tale" gives the painful story of how the Count had to watch the death of the little lads, and then of his sons, whilst he himself was enduring the agonies of starvation.

" His yonge sone, that three yeare was of age  
 Unto him said, ' Fader, why do ye wepe?  
 When will the gaoler bringen our potage?  
 Is there no morsel bred that ye do kepe?  
 I am so hungry that I may not slepe.  
 Now would God that I might slepen ever  
 Then should not hunger in my middle crepe:  
 There n'is no thing, save bred, that me were liever."

In Dante's terrible picture he shows us Ugolino interrupting himself in the dreadful vengeance of gnawing the head of his cruel captor to tell of his anguish during those last days in prison, when he had grasped the intention of the Archbishop, and knew the awful fate before them.

" When I before the morrow was awake,  
 Moaning amid their sleep I heard my sons  
 Who with me were, and asking after bread.  
 They were awake now and the hour drew nigh  
 At which our food used to be brought to us,  
 And through his dream was each one apprehensive:  
 And I heard locking up the under door  
 Of the horrible Tower; whereat without a word  
 I gazed into the faces of my sons.  
 I wept not; I within so turned to stone;  
 They wept; and darling little Anselm mine  
 Said, ' Thou dost gaze so, Father, what doth ail thee?'

Still not a tear I shed, nor answer made  
All of that day, nor yet the night thereafter,  
Until another sun rose on the world.  
As now a little glimmer made its way  
Into the dolorous prison, and I saw  
Upon four faces my own very aspect,  
Both of my hands in agony I bit ;  
And thinking that I did it from desire  
Of eating, on a sudden they uprose,  
And said they, ' Father, much less pain 'twill give us  
If thou do eat of us ; thyself didst clothe us  
With this poor flesh, and do thou strip it off.'  
I calmed me then, not to make them more sad.  
That day we all were silent and the next.  
Ah ! obdurate earth, wherefore didst thou not open ?  
When we had come unto the fourth day, Gaddo  
Threw himself down, outstretched before my feet,  
Saying, ' My father, why dost thou not help me ?'  
And then he died ; and as thou seest me,  
I saw the three fall, one by one, between  
The fifth day and the sixth ; whence I betook me,  
Already blind, to groping over each,  
And three days called them after they were dead ;  
Then hunger did what sorrow could not do."

The old historian writes, " After eight days they were removed from prison and carried wrapped in matting to the Church of the Minor Friars at San Francesco, and buried in the monument which is on the side of the steps leading into the Church near the gate of the cloister, with irons on their legs, which irons I myself saw taken out of the monument."

" For this cruelty the Pisans were much blamed through all the world where it was known ;" and the miserable fate of Count Ugolino has been made known to many generations since the writing of this verdict, through Dante's description in the Divine Comedy.



## VII

### Guido Cavalcanti

1248-1300

“ For me,—could envy enter in my sphere  
Which of all human taint is clean and quit,—  
I well might harbour it  
When I behold the peasant at his toil ;  
Guiding his team, untroubled, free from fear,  
He leaves his perfect furrow as he goes. . . .”

*Song of Fortune.*

**A**MONGST the famous men who helped to make Florence illustrious in the thirteenth century was Guido Cavalcanti, son of the great Guelf, Cavalcante de' Cavalcanti, of the house of the Cerchi. When he was a young man the citizens of Florence were divided into three great classes : the *Grandi* or Nobles, the *Popolani* or People, and the *Plebei* or Plebeians ; and Cavalcanti belonged to the first. There was much jealousy between the aristocratic descendants of the old families of Florence and the rich merchants and professional men who were beginning to share their privileges ; and the latter were strong enough in the government to get very strict laws passed in order to restrain the bloodshed and violence with which the families of the Nobles carried on their private quarrels. Soon all members of the aristocracy were excluded from the great offices of state, and only if they were members of one of the Greater Guilds could they remain in Florence. The



restrictions were much resented by these once-powerful nobles, and they angrily protested that, "If a nobleman's horse happened to whisk its tail in the face of a citizen, or if one pushed another by accident in a crowd, or even if children of different ranks quarrelled at their amusements, accusations were instantly made to the Court of Justice." Young Guido Cavalcanti shared to the full in this unfriendliness, for there was bitter rivalry between his house and the Donati; and a member of the one could not pass a member of the other in the street without insulting words.

Nevertheless Guido himself was not by nature quarrelsome, but rather given to thought, and somewhat melancholy. He was one of the most distinguished of the band of young poets, of whom Dante was one, who sought to compose verses in the Tuscan tongue; and was the one whom Dante loved and admired most. His reply to the "Sonnet" which described Dante's wonderful vision was the one which its writer appreciated most. He says, "To this sonnet I received many answers, conveying many different opinions, of the which one was sent by him whom I now call the first amongst my friends, and it began thus, 'Unto my thinking thou beheld'st all worth.' And indeed it was when he learned that I was he who sent those rhymes to him, that our friendship commenced." Guido, like Dante himself, had also an ideal lady: Joan, the beautiful daughter of the Farinata who stood alone for Florence when the Pisan conspiracy would have destroyed it. This lady, Dante tells us, "was very famous for her beauty; her right name was Joan, but because of her comeliness she was often called *Primavera*, Spring." On one occasion Dante saw her in the street, with his revered Beatrice following not far behind; and going home he wrote a dainty,

punning verse upon her walking first, like the harbinger of Love (Beatrice).

The two friends, Guido Cavalcanti and Dante Alighieri, were very unlike in character ; perhaps this was the secret of their attraction for one another. Guido, sometimes serious and passionate in his political or romantic attachments, was more often diverting himself in a whimsical and frivolous manner, with Florentine amusements and disturbances. Many stories are told of his extravagant behaviour as a young man, when, fantastically dressed or disguised as a bandit, he rode in a company of young men through the narrow streets of Florence, challenging and defying their opponents of the Neri. Not always, however, was he in a gay or defiant mood. Often he was cast down and depressed, and, as in his *Song of Fortune*, quoted at the head of this chapter, disposed to envy the humble lot of those who had to perplex themselves only with the question of how to get their daily bread. He seems to have been of the same temperament as the poet Gray, with now and then a dash of fiery enthusiasm, for Love or for Politics, like Shelley.

A favourite subject of difference, if not of dispute, with his friend Dante, was the greatness of Virgil. Dante revered him as the supreme master of Poetry. Guido Cavalcanti, like Shelley in his youth, thought that to be a philosopher was greater than to be a poet, and would not praise Virgil highly. The new devotion to learning led to the revival of a pretty fiction amongst scholars ; that as knights and cavaliers sought out gallant deeds by which to show honour to some lady of their adoration, so scholars and poets should do homage to the beautiful personality of Philosophy, or Learning, or Wisdom. Hence the young poets tried to combine the two ideas, and to have the inner meaning of their poems refer to "divine Philosophy," while the obvious one expressed

devotion to some idealised lady. Dante did this most successfully. Indeed, many people thought for some time that "Beatrice" was not a real woman but the personification of Philosophy.

Guido and Dante admitted another young Florentine to their friendship; this was Lapo degli Farinata, brother of the fair Joan whom Guido loved. One of Dante's sonnets prettily commemorates their companionship :—

" Guido, I would that Lapo, thou and I,  
Could be by spells conveyed, as it were now,  
Upon a barque, with all the winds that blow,  
Across all seas at our good will to hie." . . .

All the three friends were much interested in the stormy politics of the city, and Dante and Guido were keen students as well. Dante's knowledge of history, a subject he had always loved, was great, and he read, too, the Greek and Latin philosophers, while Guido cared more for Logic and Natural Science. He was a great chess-player, and used to think so profoundly during the game that he was quite unconscious of his surroundings.

One day while playing with a friend in the shady palace square near the market-place, a mischievous boy fastened his cloak securely to the wooden bench upon which he sat, much perplexing him when he rose at the end of the game.

At one time Dante seems to have been so worried and troubled that he neglected his friend and his studies, and tried to forget himself in public amusements and diversions. The studious Guido wrote to him a sonnet, complaining of the change in him :—

" I come to thee by daytime constantly,  
But in thy thoughts too much of baseness find :  
Greatly it grieves me, for thy gentle mind,  
And for thy many virtues gone from thee.

It was thy wont to shun much company,  
Unto all sorry concourse ill inclined  
And still thy speech of me, heartfelt and kind,  
Had made me treasure up thy poetry. . . ."

Presently the breach was healed, and the two friends, united in political work, in study, and in the practice of poetry, became famous as two of the leading men in Florence.

Cavalcanti, after the custom of the time, went on a pilgrimage to the shrine of S. James of Compostella; and his great enemies, the Donati, laid a plot to waylay him on the road and kill him. In some way the plot miscarried, and Cavalcanti was warned in time, so that he returned to Florence in safety, wearing the cockleshell, the emblem of the saint. He did not attempt to take steps to avenge himself upon the Donati, and they became more and more insolent. But one day, meeting the head of the house riding with a train of followers in the streets of Florence, Guido set spurs in his horse and charged violently at him, javelin in hand. The horse tripped, so that Guido missed his aim, and he was wounded in the scuffle with the attendants which followed.

Every one, even his enemies, admired the fearless, quiet man, who seemed so entirely a student, until need proved him a warrior. But the gay young idlers of Florence had no sympathy with his love of learning and reflection, and delighted to play tricks upon him, and to make fun of his absent-mindedness. We are told that one day, when he went to walk in the churchyard and cloisters of the famous church of S. John Baptist for his usual quiet meditation, Signior Betto Brunelleschi, a gay citizen of Florence, and a band of idle young men, riding past, observed him there. Said Betto, "Yonder is Guido amongst the graves and tombs; let us go and make some jests to anger him."





ATTACK ON THE DONATI BY GUIDO CAVALCANTI





Then they rode up and surrounded him, laughingly shouting, "Ah! Guido with the best head! What are you looking for? You will never find it! And if you do, what will you do with it?"

Guido, startled but not offended, rebuked them with a quiet, "Gentlemen, you may use me in your own house as you please"; then, to their great amazement, placing his hand on a high tomb he vaulted lightly over it, and walked away. Half ashamed and half admiring, some of the jesters began to say: "Guido is foolish. This is not our House; he thinks too much, and then talks nonsense." But Signior Betto, who felt himself to blame, replied, "Alas, Gentlemen: Guido is right. Here we are amongst the Houses of the dead, to which we must all come; and our behaviour has been so foolish as to show that when we are dead there will be nothing worthy by which to remember us. Truly, these Houses are ours." So the roysterers went off, muttering and disappointed that their joke had fared so ill.

In the year 1300 the struggle between the Neri and the Bianchi became more violent than ever. On the first of May in that year during the festivities with which the Florentines greeted the summer, the parties came to open warfare. In the gaily decorated streets, where bands of maidens danced in procession, waving garlands and singing songs, armed and mounted men fought in savage earnest. The sympathies of the populace were divided; some stood by the Bianchi, but more admired and supported the Neri. Corso Donati, the most powerful of these, won the popular favour by his daring and insolent behaviour. So that when fighting began, many of the townspeople joined in, and the gay festival of spring was marred by riot and bloodshed. In June took place the elections of Priors, or Magistrates, who held office for only three months,

and Dante was elected for his guild. To ensure peace the city council banished several of the important men on either side, and amongst these were the bitter foes, Corso Donati and Guido Cavalcanti.

Guido, unhappy and uncared-for, soon became ill, and lay in a strange city pining for Florence. He wrote a sad little poem, beginning in the usual graceful fashion :—

“ Because I think not ever to return,  
Ballad, to Tuscany,—  
Go therefore thou for me  
Straight to my lady’s face,  
Who, of her noble grace,  
Shall give thee courtesy.”

When, with the election of new priors, the banished offenders were allowed to go back to their homes, Cavalcanti returned ; but he never recovered, and died in December of that year.

Dante shows us Guido’s father, with the great Farinata degli Uberti, waiting in their fiery tombs until the last judgment. As Virgil and Dante pause, the haughty Farinata speaks, reminding Dante that his family had always been opposed to the Uberti, and had suffered banishment on that account. Then beside him rises a pale shadow and asks :—

“ If thou through this blind prison goest,  
Led by thy lofty genius and profound,  
Where is my son ? and wherefore not with thee ? ”

Dante replies that his companion is one whom Guido “ had in contempt ” ; and the shadowy one exclaims,

“ How ! saidst thou he *had* ?  
No longer lives he ? Strikes not on his eye  
The blessed daylight ? ”

Before Dante could frame a reply Cavalcanti sank back into his tomb.

Part Two  
The Purgatorio

*" Such is this steep ascent,  
That it is ever difficult at first,  
But more a man proceeds, less evil grows.  
When pleasant it shall seem to thee, so much  
That upward going shall be easy to thee  
As in a vessel to go down the tide,  
Then of this path thou wilt have reach'd the end."*

DANTE.

*" In this pleasant soil  
His far more pleasant garden GOD ordained ;  
Out of the fertile ground He caused to grow  
All trees of noblest kind for sight, smell, taste ;  
And all amid them stood the Tree of Life . . .  
Our death, the Tree of Knowledge, grew fast by . . .  
Southward through Eden went a river large,  
Nor changed his course, but through the shaggy hill  
Passed underneath engulfed ; for GOD had thrown  
That mountain as his garden mould. . . ."*

MILTON.

## VIII

# The Purgatorio

**T**HE early Christian thought which accepted the idea of a geographical place for Hell, also demanded an actual region where the souls of the departed wait for judgment, and expiate, in loving penitence, the sins of their mortal life. Dante places Purgatory at the exact antipodes of Jerusalem, and represents it as a mountain thrown up by the earth's convulsion when Satan and his angels plunged down to the earth's centre. On its summit is the Garden of Eden, the Earthly Paradise; and this journey signifies the truth which Dante desired to express, that, in seeking to gain Heaven, man must first recover the perfect earthly life. He represents Virgil and himself reaching the earth's surface, through the winding cavern, on a low-lying shore east of the mountain, seeing with delight Venus on the Eastern horizon, and, above, the Southern Constellations unseen by man since the Fall.

Turning northward they begin the slow ascent which winds by many spirals up the mount. A guardian of the region of Purgatory challenges their approach; and Virgil, recognising the shade as the Spirit of Cato, Cæsar's chief opponent, explains to him that they have Divine commands to proceed. Cato bids him to gird his companion with the rush of humility and to cleanse his face,



murky with the stains of Hell, with dew, and to lead him on. They cross a lonely shore where reeds and rushes wave tremblingly, and, after Dante's face is bathed, a green stem is bound around him, and they are ready to begin the ascent. While they wait, perplexed, they see a glowing light approaching swiftly, and, under the guidance of a blessed Pilot, a boat glides smoothly along bearing happy souls to the Mountain of Purification. Now they alight, and a melody of great beauty is heard, the singing in sweet unison of the ancient Song of the Exodus: "When Israel came out of Egypt, and the house of Judah from amongst the strange people; Judah was his sanctuary and Israel his dominion."

Dante recognises a dear familiar face amongst the spirits, Casella of Florence, a musician who had written music for some of Dante's poems. Dante advances to greet and embrace him, but clasps to himself only intangible air. The band of souls are as startled with the sight of Dante, a breathing man, as he is at beholding them; but while they linger, wondering, Cato chides them for delay and bids them hasten on. "Then saw I that company leave the singing and go towards the hill-side, like one who goes but knoweth not when he may come forth."

Purgatory, like Hell, has three main divisions, in each of which are found the souls of those who have erred against Love—by perverse loving, by defective loving, and by excessive loving. In the ante-Purgatory or vestibule are the souls of the late-repentant or the excommunicate, and here Dante discerns one with a deep cleft over one of his eyebrows; "and he showed a wound above his breast, saying, 'I am Manfred, grandson of Empress Constance.'" The band of Spirits, of whom Manfred is one, are amazed to see, wandering in

their domain, a man who casts a shadow, as does the living Dante. Virgil is apparent now only as a spirit.

After weary climbing of the ascent to the terraced level above, Dante pleads for a moment's rest, and they pause near a shady rock. Here he sees the souls of those who deferred repentance till their death-beds, and even now, in their postures, showing indolence and lack of devotion. One is seen to be a Florentine of Dante's time, a maker of musical instruments, and notorious for idleness. When they reach the next height they hear a mournful chanting of the *Miserere*, and behold a group of souls singing. These are they who met with violent deaths, and made their peace with God at the last moment. One of them was the Count of Montefeltro, son of the Ghibelline leader, who was slain in the battle of Campaldino, in which Dante had fought as a young man.

As they wind round the sloping side of the mountain, still ascending, they see, standing solitary and alone, wrapped in thought, a spirit whom Virgil greets. He springs forward, exclaiming, "O Mantuan, I am Sordello of thy city"; and the two poets embrace. Then travelling on, with Sordello as guide, they reach a peaceful dell in the folds of the mountain, where on a flower-besprinkled grassy plain they see seated figures singing "*Salve Regina*," and learn that they are the spirits of kings and rulers who had neglected their kingdoms from self-seeking or indolence. These are the Emperor Rudolph, "who might have healed the wounds that were the death of Italy": Philip the Bold of France and his son, Philip the Fair: Peter the Third of Aragon and his rival Charles of Anjou: and Henry the Third of England, the "King of the Simple life."

With twilight they descend into a quiet vale, and as

they approach they hear the devout evening hymn of the souls gathered there, *Te lucis ante terminum* : and as it dies away Dante recognises the famous judge, Nino de Visconti of Pisa, and Conrad de Malaspini, who married Costanza, a daughter of the Emperor Frederic II. Creeping on the far side of the dell Dante sees a snake, but two guarding angels with green robes and wings swoop down upon it and drive it away. Dante now sinks to slumber, worn out with fatigue, and when he awakes learns that he has been wafted to a higher place, near the gate of Purgatory proper.

A narrow portal, guarded by an austere angel, is approached by three steps, Sincerity, Contrition, and Love : "The first step was white marble so polished and smooth that I mirrored me therein : the second, darker was than perse, of a rugged and calcined stone, cracked in its length and in its breadth ; the third seemed to me of porphyry so flaming red as blood ; and a threshold of adamantine stone." Dante climbs these stairs, and as he kneels and begs admission, the angel marks with his sword seven P's upon his forehead, signifying *Peccata*, for the Seven Deadly Sins ; and then turning his gold and silver keys, the gate swings back. As Dante enters he hears a distant sound of singing, and listening, distinguishes the old Ambrosian Hymn, *Te Deum Laudamus*.

The pathway upon which the pilgrims stand is rugged and uneven like the waves in a tumultuous sea, and a hard climb of three hours is needed to bring them to the rim of the first great terrace. On the inner side the wall is of fairest marble carved with scenes from history, all bearing upon Humility. In the sculptures Dante sees characters from sacred and from later history : the Emperor Trajan amongst them. Then he sees,

approaching from afar, figures bent and bowed to the earth beneath heavy burdens of stones, and learns that these are the Proud of the Earth. They move slowly, murmuring words from the Lord's Prayer, and amongst them Dante recognises a certain Count Umberto of Sienna noted in life for his unreasoning arrogance and pride; Oderisi, a famous miniature painter of Umbria; and Provenzana Salvini, a Ghibelline leader of Sienna, once of high fame but now nearly forgotten.

After speech with Oderisi, Dante paces sadly on, and sees on the pavement beneath his feet tracings that presently reveal human figures. These are the defeated Proud: amongst the portraits are those of Lucifer, and Cyrus, and Nimrod, and Niobe of Thebes, and Saul of Israel, and Rehoboam. Then an angel meets them and shows them an easy stair of ascent, and as they mount thereon their ears are blessed with the sound of sweet singing: "Blessed are the poor in Spirit," the voices chant. The angel with his wing brushes Dante's forehead, and he feels that there are left only six of the mysterious characters he had borne before. The terrace where they now stand is quite blank and empty, "an even way of livid stone." In this circle dwell the once Envious, for purification; clad in grey cloaks and with their eyelids caught down with a strong stitch, "as is done to a wild hawk because it abideth not still." Dante is shamed to watch those who cannot see him, and he presently addresses the silent figures. One replies, and says that she was Sapia, a lady of Sienna, the wife of the powerful lord, dei Saracini; and had lived full of envy towards her fellow-citizens. All that Dante had known of her before was that in the year of his birth she had founded a hospice for wayfarers; now he sees her expiating the sin of Envy; and moreover, she warns



him that he, too, will have to do so for being "envious at the foolish," and disdainful in his learning.

After walking round the terrace till about three o'clock in the afternoon, they ascend by a stairway to the next level, hearing above them the sound of sweet voices chanting, "Blessed are the merciful," and they reach the waiting-place of those who on earth were wrathful. In a momentary Vision Dante sees before him examples of patience and meekness: the Blessed Virgin, S. Stephen, and Pisistratus of Athens, and it is with reluctance that he comes out of his trance at Virgil's behest. They walk on towards the setting sun, and a dark cloud of smoke comes rolling towards them, so that Dante can see nothing, and Virgil leads him like a blind man. Then there is borne towards them the sound of the tender chant, "O Lamb of God," and Dante asks his guide who are the blessed spirits who thus sing. Virgil replies that "they are untying the knot of anger"; and one, hearing their voices, speaks to them: "A Lombard was I and called Mark"; and Dante remembers him as a nobleman of Venice in his own youth.

Presently they go up another stair, and Dante feels the stroke of an angel's wing on his forehead, and hears above the singing of sweet voices that utter the Third Beatitude: "Blessed are the Peacemakers." He asks Virgil what sin is purged there, and is told that it is the sin of Sloth. As they pace along the way many spirits, running, overtake them from behind, crying, "Haste! Haste! let no time be lost through little love." One speaks to him as he hurries past, saying that he was an Abbot of San Zeno in Verona, "under the rule of the good Barbarossa." Then in the quiet gloom Dante falls asleep. With morning Virgil wakes him, and again they

## The Purgatorio

III

ascend a stair ; again the angel's wing brushes his forehead, and, as they walk, he hears sung, " Blessed are they that mourn."

In this, the Fifth terrace, the souls of the Prodigal and Avaricious cleave to the pavement, sighing ; Dante addresses one, and learns that it is the spirit of Pope Adrian V. who perpetually laments his covetousness on earth : " What avarice works, here is declared in the purgation of the down-turned souls ; even as our eyes, fixed on earthly things, did not lift themselves on high, so here justice hath cast them to earth." Dante kneels down beside him, and the spirit asks, " What reason thus bent thee down ? " to which Dante replies, " Because of your dignity my conscience smote me for standing." But he is bidden to stand, by the weeping soul, who explains, " A fellow-servant am I with thee and with the others unto one Power." Passing on, Dante hears one of the prostrate souls reciting great examples of those who were generous and content to be poor on earth, a roll of honour which is gone through day by day, while at night warning is given by the rehearsal of the names and deeds of those who erred through covetousness. Dante hears the voice proclaim the Blessed Virgin, who laid her new born Son in the manger of a stable, " because there was no room for them in the Inn " : Caius Fabricius, the Roman Consul, who refused both gifts and bribes : and Nicholas, Bishop of Myra in the fourth century, who gave away his substance to the poor of his city. Hugh Capet, the founder of the royal house of France, is the speaker, and he explains, " When the night cometh, a contrary sound we take up : then we rehearse Pygmalion, whom insatiate lust of gold made traitor, thief and parricide ; Midas, whose misery following his greedy request, maketh us



forever laugh ; Achan, who stole the spoils under the great leader Joshua ; Sapphira and her husband ; and Crassus, nicknamed the Wealthy, who was triumvir with Cæsar and Pompey." Then suddenly Dante hears a great and joyful shout, and the earth upon which they stand tumbles as in an earthquake. From all the terraces goes up the mighty cry, "Glory to God in the highest," and Dante feels within him an intense and burning desire for further knowledge.

During the journeying Virgil has discoursed to him on Love, explaining its nature and perfection, and how the offences he sees there being purged were first, and most of all, sins against love ; but there is much that he still longs to understand and know. So he walks, pensive and wrapped in thought, soon to be overtaken by a spirit who greets them with, "My brothers, God give you peace !" Virgil returns the salutation, and the spirit asks why they are there, to which Virgil replies that they both are fellow-spirits with him who asks ; poets, that is ; and that though Dante is still alive in the body he has had special sanction given him to travel through that region. He then asks a question in order that Dante's perplexity may be removed by the spirit's answer : "Why the mount gave such shakings, and wherefore all seemed to shout with one voice ?" They are told that when a humble soul rises from its purgation and proceeds to climb the mount, then the earth shakes and the heavenly anthem is sung in joy. For while no soul is eager to end its sufferings, being drawn by a great love to desire to show its penitance, yet, when with devout will to endure, there comes, too, the will to arise, that is the sign that it is purged and clean. They ask who it is that speaks, and the spirit replies that he is Statius, a Roman

poet of the first century after Christ, who wrote the *Thebaid*.

“ Of Thebes I sang,  
And next of great Achilles, but i' the way  
Fell with my second burthen.<sup>1</sup> Of my flame  
Those sparkles were the seeds, which I derived  
From the bright fountain of celestial fire  
That feeds unnumber'd lamps ; the song I mean  
Which sounds Æneas' wanderings : *that* the breast  
I hung at ; *that* the nurse, from whom my veins  
Drank inspiration : whose authority  
Was ever sacred with me. To have lived  
Cœval with the Mantuan, I would bide  
The revolution of another sun  
Beyond my stated years in banishment.”

Dante, amazed and delighted with this expression of reverence for the great Master who is his Guide, reveals to Statius that the spirit of the Mantuan is here, before him. Statius bends to embrace his feet, and then, conversing, they go on together towards the Sixth stairway. In this circle is expiated the sin of Gluttony ; and Statius tells Virgil that he himself has already spent well-nigh five centuries in the circle of the Prodigal and Avaricious. He seems to mean that he had been spendthrift of time and opportunity :—

“ I was baptised ; but secretly, through fear ;  
Remain'd a Christian and conform'd long time  
To Pagan rites.”

Conversing together, the Three Poets climb the stairway to the Sixth Circle, hearing sweet voices that sing, “ Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after Righteousness,” and the angel's wing brushes another P from Dante's forehead. Soon they come to a Tree whose spreading branches stretch far around, and down

<sup>1</sup> Statius died when only a small part of the *Achilleid* was written.

the steep rock beside it runs a crystal stream. As Dante's eyes longingly scan the drooping boughs, a voice within the foliage is heard saying, "Ye shall be chary of me," and wonderingly he lingers till Virgil chides him. Then he hears soft voices round him, murmuring in song, "O Lord, open Thou my lips," and as they walk on together a crowd of spirits overtake them, and look with surprise upon them. Dante is much moved to see the extreme emaciation of all their faces; so thin are they that the eyes seem sunken between brow and cheek-bones. Amongst them is Forese, a member of the noble Florentine house of Donati; in life a friend of Dante, and, in youth, one of his most constant companions. Forese explains to him that it is through the prayers and devotion of his wife, Nella, that he is in Purgatory instead of enduring the hopeless pains of Hell. Next they meet the spirit of a poet of Arezzo, da Lucca, whom Dante had known, and they speak of Poetry together. Then they come to another Tree, and learn that it is from a slip of that one in the Garden of Eden of which Eve tasted the fruit. Voices amongst its branches are heard reciting warnings from examples of gluttony and much caring for food. They speak of those Hebrews under Gideon who "showed themselves soft at the drinking:"<sup>1</sup> and Dante walks on, deep in thought, till aroused by an angel who directs them there to turn for the ascent to the Seventh and last circle.

Here the passage is perilous, for flames of fire dazzle the sight, and the angel warns them, "Strict rein must in this place direct the eyes," and, perplexed and sad, Dante sees spirits in the flames, who are thus being purged from sins of uncleanness, "fleshly lusts that

<sup>1</sup> *Judges* vii.

war against the soul." Amongst them he recognises Guinicelli, the poet whom his friend Guido Cavalcanti rivalled and excelled; and this spirit points out that of another poet, even more famous, Arnaut Daniel, companion and favourite of Richard Cœur-de-Lion. He greets Dante, saying,

" I am Arnaut ; and with songs,  
Sorely waymenting for my folly past,  
Thorough this ford of fire I wade, and see  
The day I hope for smiling in my view."

Dante is much impressed when he sees that none of the souls seem to desire to escape, or to avoid, suffering, or to shorten the time of expiation. Each seems bent upon bearing, as fully and completely as possible, everything that may serve to remove the stain of sin, and to desire above everything to show the sincerity of his penitence and the ardour of his love. The song the pilgrims hear as they reach the last stair is, " Blessed are the pure in heart "; and with nightfall Dante falls asleep between his two spirit-companions, Virgil and Statius.

In the morning, when Dante awakes, they climb to the summit, and here Virgil takes leave of him; the Earthly Paradise is attained. As Dante explores the blissful region with slow steps, he sees, beyond, a little stream,

" A sight so sudden in bewilderment  
That every other thought the shock doth daze—  
A lady, all alone, who, as she went,  
Sang evermore and gathered flower on flower."

This is the lady Matilda, whom most commentators identify as the *Grancontessa* of Tuscany, the loving disciple and benefactor of the Church during the late

eleventh and early twelfth centuries. Dante hastens to greet her in true scholarly fashion : "Thou makest me to remember where and what Proserpine was in the time her mother lost her and she lost the spring." The lady Matilda smiles graciously upon him, and draws near to the brink of the stream, telling him many things. "At the end of her words, singing like an enamoured lady, she continued, 'Blessed are they whose unrighteousness is forgiven'; and she then advanced against the stream, walking on the bank and I abreast of her, little step answering with little step." <sup>1</sup>

Then he sees, on the farther side of the stream, a divine Pageant representing God's revelation of Himself to man in the Old and the New Testaments and the Christian Church. Lost in amazement he turns towards Virgil for enlightenment, but finds him gone ; and hears a voice of ringing sweetness say, "Dante, for that Virgil goeth away, weep not yet, weep not yet, for thou must weep for other sword-wounds." He recognises the speaker as his ideal Beatrice ; but she gazes upon him sternly, and rebukes him for having so fallen away from his high aspirations of youth as to become the friend and companion of men like Forese Donati.

Contrite and ashamed he acknowledges that he too soon forgot his ideal when once she was removed from his sight, and falls senseless to the ground. When he awakes he is neck-deep in the stream and hears sweet voices singing, "Cleanse thou me and I shall be whiter than snow." Beside him stands Matilda, and she draws him across the stream of Lethe, plunging his head into the water as she moves. When he reaches the other side he sees heavenly nymphs who graciously receive him and present him to Beatrice : "Turn, Beatrice,

<sup>1</sup> Dent's "Temple Classics" Dante : Mr Okey's Translation.





THE MEETING IN PARADISE



turn thy holy eyes to thy faithful one, who to see thee hath moved so many steps." In a mysterious way Dante and his silent companion Statius take their places in the pageant he had seen approaching, and they make their way through a forest towards the Tree of Knowledge. Beatrice directs him to drink of another stream, Eunoë, to "requicken his fainting virtue," and the story of the Purgatorio ends with his happy declaration, "I came back from the most holy waves, born again, . . . and ready to mount to the stars."

## IX

### The Countess Matilda

1046-1115

"Singing, like unto an enamoured lady,  
'Beati quorum tecta sunt peccata.'"

*Purgatorio xxix.*

**T**WO centuries before Dante was born the city of Florence was under the special government and protection of the Countess Matilda, Marchioness of Tuscany. This great lady was the daughter of the powerful Marquis Boniface, and, on his death, had become with her mother, Beatrice of Lorraine, joint ruler of the wide dominions of her father. Under her may be said to have begun the great strife which was afterwards to be known as the division between Guelfs and Ghibellines; for in the eleventh century the Papacy at Rome, not content with spiritual supremacy, was contending with kings and emperors for temporal power. At this time the noble Hildebrand, who had become Pope Gregory VII., was opposing the attempt of the Emperor Henry IV. of Germany to conquer Italy.

The father of this sovereign, desiring to control the wealth of the growing Italian towns, Lucca, Pisa, and Florence, had persecuted Count Boniface until his death, imprisoned the Countess Beatrice, banished the Count's brother, and, by his cruelties, brought about the death

of Matilda's young brother and sister. When Henry came to the throne he looked for an easy conquest over the widowed Countess Beatrice. Her marriage with Godefroi of Lorraine, brother of the Pope, had, however, so strengthened her position that she and her gifted daughter Matilda were able not only to hold fast the marquisate of Tuscany and the duchy of Spoleto, but also to assist Pope Gregory in his wars against the Emperor.

The death of the Countess Beatrice left Matilda in sole possession; but as, according to the laws of the Salic dynasties, a woman could neither inherit nor pass on a claim to sovereignty even over a province, her title was most insecure. Thus she supported more strongly than ever the side of the Papacy against the Emperor; for the power of Rome was often, in those stormy, turbulent days, exerted on the side of the weaker and the oppressed against the tyranny of the strong. Florence, partly, perhaps, from its nearness to Rome, and partly through Matilda's energy and good government, was faithful to the Pope. But some of the Italian cities, as Lucca, Pisa, and Sienna gave their allegiance to the Emperor. Count Boniface, like most feudal rulers of the time, had plundered and injured towns and populations, who now were able to retaliate by disowning his successor.

One of the great reforms for Florence, which were made possible by the energy and courage of Matilda, was the destruction of the many feudal castles of the German nobles on the heights around the city. Like the owners of the Norman Castles in England, at a little later period, these powerful barons exercised stern control of the people, demanding heavy taxes in the way of labour and maintenance, and compelling



the use of their own mills and ovens. The city of Florence stood on a wide plain surrounded with hills, on the most northerly of which, Fiesole, had been the ancient Roman settlement from which her citizens proudly claimed descent. In the time of the Countess Matilda a great convent stood beside the old citadel on the heights of Fiesole, known as the Vallombrosa, of the order of S. Benedict ; and it was the desire and delight of this lady to aid in the building and enrichment of other great abbeys and monasteries in Florence itself.

A strange story is told of a sight witnessed by her while she was still young, and when her mother and her step-father were yet alive. A charge of covetousness and irreverence had been brought against the authorities of the Vallombrosan monastery ; and popular feeling ran so high, for and against the accused, that the monks demanded to have their innocence attested by the Ordeal of Fire. In vain the Pope forbade the trial ; and a certain monk, Peter, proclaimed himself ready to walk through the fire, and, if need be, alone. So, on a great space outside the city, two piles of wood were lighted, and a great procession of people, men, women and children, set out from the town chanting prayers and psalms. There the monk passed through the roaring flames, amidst the horrified hush of the assembly, and came out unscathed by the fire. People rushed to him to kiss the hem of his robe and to beg his blessing, and loud shouts of "Pietro Igneo" rent the air. He was afterwards made Cardinal and Bishop, and venerated for especial sanctity as well as for his vindication of the brotherhood.

The Countess Matilda seems to have made her chief residence at Florence, and to have journeyed thence about her province, administering justice in the chief

towns that owned her allegiance. She restored many of the estates that had been alienated by her imperious father, and of others she made offerings to the Church and built abbeys and convents. There was then but one bridge over the Arno, the Ponte Vecchio, and the city was not completely walled; or, at least, it had extended its boundaries beyond the narrow walls. Determined to resist the Emperor and to preserve their independence, the Florentines now began to enclose the whole of their town in a strong fortification, making gates and posterns for the highways leading out of the city. Like our own old English towns, the drainage was by means of fosses, or ditches, and one or two of the ancient landmarks still remain in names like "San Jacopo tra Fossi." Some old prisons which have been pulled down during the last forty years were recognised as part of this boundary; and, wedged in a corner in the Piazza Santa Croci, there is still a butcher's shop which was mentioned as forming an angle of the old wall in a survey of the city taken in the middle of the sixteenth century.

In the year when Matilda assumed control of Tuscany it was her lot to take part in a bitter contest between the Papacy and the Emperor Henry IV. The election of Hildebrand as Pope Gregory VII. had been accomplished without any reference to the Emperor, whose predecessors had always claimed a voice in the creation of the Pontiffs. This so incensed the haughty monarch that he issued a decree declaring Gregory beyond the pale of Christendom, and sent it by an enthusiastic priest to the Great Council assembled in the Lateran.

When the astounding message was read the new Pope ordered the instant arrest of the messenger, and rising in his seat pronounced the full sentence of excommuni-

cation upon the daring monarch. This caused the Emperor's supporters to fall away from him, and he realised that he could not stand alone against the power of the Church. So in the severe winter of 1077 he crossed the Alps, with the Empress and his little son, in obedience to Gregory's summons, and humbly approached the great castle of Canossa. Attending him came a train of abbots and bishops belonging to his realm, who had supported him in his profanity; and, after humbly abasing themselves, they were pardoned. But the Emperor himself was kept in a humiliating position as an outlaw beyond the castle walls, and in vain the Countess Matilda pleaded with the offended Gregory for his forgiveness. Only after long delay was the message of pardon conveyed to him, and then only on condition of performing the severest penance. To the horror of the princes and of the noble-hearted Matilda, the Emperor was required to remove his royal robes, and, clad only in a woollen garment, kneel for three days in the outer court of the castle in token of his complete and penitent submission.

It was the year after this that the people of Florence began the fortifications just described, and they were accomplished none too soon; for the Emperor, burning with the indignity put upon him by the Pope, took up arms against him and openly declared war. Matilda led an army into Mantua to oppose Henry's triumphal progress, but was defeated, and all Lombardy went over to the Emperor's side. Nothing daunted, however, the Countess returned to Tuscany, and led the Florentines in their struggle for liberty. After taking Ravenna, Henry marched to Florence and besieged it; but so resolute were the people, and so ably controlled were their defences by the Countess and her soldiers, that

the Emperor gave up the siege and retreated with considerable loss. Thus Florence was almost the only town of importance which held out against the sovereignty of the Emperor, and with the Countess Matilda as suzerain, it laid the foundations of its democratic freedom.

The rule maintained by the Emperors and their predecessors over the Italian towns, which in earlier days had formed various Leagues or Confederacies with each other, has been described as resembling that of Great Britain and her Colonies. Certain great nobles were appointed representatives of the king's authority with power to exact money payments in his name upon their trade or merchandise. They were Dukes, Marquises (if the district were on the borders, or marches, of the King's dominions), Counts, Captains and Vavasours, of varying feudal rank and dignity. The government of the cities which clung to the Papacy seems to have been more independent, since allegiance was held, as in the case of Florence, to the suzerain of the Pope, who left the control of municipal affairs very much in the hands of the townspeople.

Amongst the archives of Florence are two documents which show the Countess Matilda receiving from a certain Count Guido, the court and lands of Campiano, as a gift to the monastery of San Reparata, and the granting of some papal favour to the monks of Vallombrosa. Whilst allowing much freedom to the city in its management of trade and business, the Countess seems to have claimed its assistance in money and troops when other more rebellious cities had to be punished. Thus we find Florentine levies fighting under her command at Prato and at Ferrara in the early years of the twelfth century. For this great-hearted woman was not only a wise and determined ruler, but also a brilliant military



leader. As a girl of fifteen she had ridden at the head of a troop despatched by her father to subdue a rebellion in a remote part of his domain, and ever since had not hesitated to assume active command of her army when need arose. Thus during the last ten years of her life the Countess Matilda was almost Queen of Italy; for much of Lombardy, with Mantua and Milan, submitted to her rule; and large territories across the Alps, which had been part of her mother's dowry, were also hers.

We may think of her, the old historians tell us, as continually in movement about her states; administering justice, devising and sanctioning public works, granting privileges and bestowing favours, and encouraging the founding and endowment of cathedrals, churches and abbeys, as signs of her homage to the Christian faith. While she was thus honoured and supreme, her sometime foe and fallen tyrant, the Emperor Henry IV., had been warred against and imprisoned by his own son, and left to die of starvation. One of the most startling and impressive scenes in the history of the times must have been the meeting of this new Emperor and the Countess Matilda, at Florence, as he travelled with a gorgeous retinue to Rome, to have his coronation confirmed. With no slavish terror did the powerful lady and her freedom-loving city greet the new tyrant; and when, securely on his throne, he sought the submission of all independent states, Tuscany, under her inspiration, held out against him; Florence especially showing defiance by harassing his feudal barons and shaking off every semblance of their power.

When the Emperor himself led an army against Florence, hoping thus to subdue the city, the Countess Matilda, who had been directing the construction of the famous baths of Pisa, and the beautifying of that town,



encouraged the undaunted citizens of Florence successfully to oppose and defy him.

Two years later, at the age of sixty-nine, this warrior-countess died at her winter-palace at Monte Baroncione. She had, during the autumn, put down a revolt of the Mantuans, and exacted heavy tribute as a penalty for their disloyalty. Then, in just such an inclement winter as that of years before at Canossa, she celebrated the Christmas feast with much devotion and lavish acts of charity, and passed away to her rest. She bequeathed her great territories to the Church, with the condition that the free cities she had protected and fostered should retain their independence. Thus, in her death as in her life, she sought to strengthen the supreme spiritual power against the supreme temporal power, resisting the tyranny of feudal nobles over communities and that of the feudal Emperor over the Church.

For this, as well as for the force and beauty of her personal character, Dante, the lover of his country and his native city, revered her memory, and paid her conspicuous honour in his "Comedy." In his homage to Matilda he represents her as the guardian spirit of the Earthly Paradise :—

" A lady all alone, who went along  
Singing and culling floweret after floweret,  
With which her pathway was all painted over."

*Purgatorio xxviii.*

In reply to his wondering questions she begins the divine instruction of his mind which Beatrice herself afterwards carries on in the mysterious ascent ; leads him to bathe in the river of Lethe, that he may forget all unworthy things ; and afterwards, at the bidding of the Blessed Beatrice herself, to drink of the waters of Eunoë that he may have the memory of all things good.

# X

## King Manfred of Sicily

1200-1265

“Horrible my iniquities had been ;  
But Infinite Goodness hath such ample arms,  
That it receives whatever turns to it.”

*Purgatorio* iii.

**M**ANFRED, Prince of Tarento, was the most brilliant and gifted son of the great Frederic II., surnamed the Severe, Emperor of Germany and King of Naples and Sicily from 1220 to 1250. Like his illustrious father, he was of handsome appearance and commanding presence ; a poet and musician ; witty in discourse and apt in jesting speech. When at home, in the shelter and luxury of the court, he was accustomed to wear an entirely green suit, fantastically made and richly ornamented, and to show himself full of mirth and high device for the entertainment of all. But he was no idle knight, for with the chance of war Manfred was first in the field and ever returned goodly blow for blow.

On the death of Frederic his eldest son Conrad became Emperor, and Manfred, Regent of Naples and Sicily. His military skill and strong government aroused the jealousy of Conrad, who had but little of his father's force of character. This sovereign dying

after but a short reign his little son, Conradine, the future Emperor, became the ward of Manfred, and Manfred, no longer Regent but King of the Sicilies. His brother Frederic, King of Antioch, shared in his military and personal ambition, and together they planned and fought for the extension of the Empire.

By this time the distinction of Guelf and Ghibelline, or Papacy and Emperor, had become fully established throughout Italy; and the genius of Frederic II. had won to his side most of the great trading towns in that country, although he ignored similar bodies in Germany. But usually there were to be found the two political parties in every city, and the Emperor's representatives pretended to hold impartial sway by taking hostages for peace from each. As a matter of fact the Guelfic hostages were often left to pine away in imprisonment whilst the Ghibellines were speedily released. One of the cities in which the two parties were to be found in bitter rivalry was Florence; and though previously the Ghibellines had been the stronger, in the year 1251 the town was so strongly Guelfic that the Popular Government, or City Commune, made a treaty with the feudal barons, or maritime lords, whose castles and estates lay between Florence and the sea board, to permit Florentine traders to have free access to the ports and harbours. This offended the rival city of Pisa which had long been Ghibelline, and her Council and people felt that their commercial rights were being invaded. Hence this city hastened to make alliance with Sienna, and together they made a secret league with some of the Florentines in support of King Manfred.

Thus arose civil war in Florence, and in the contest the Guelfs showed themselves both stronger and more resolute, so that many of the Ghibelline leaders were

banished. Amongst these were the heads of the noble families of the Uberti and the Lamperti. They took refuge in Sienna; and when the Guelfs of Florence demanded their expulsion and were refused, war was declared between the two cities.

The city of Sienna was especially fervent in support of King Manfred as the representative of the future Emperor, Conradine, but Pisa was less enthusiastic, especially since the Florentine refugees had fled to Sienna. There was, too, a party of Pisan Guelfs of sufficient importance to join in a league with Florence and to offer the suzerainty of the Guelfic cities to Alphonso the Wise, King of Castile. The ambassador appointed to arrange this with the Papal advisers of Alphonso was the scholar-diplomatist, Ser Brunetto Latini, afterwards tutor to Dante Alighieri, and the sons of other leading Florentine families.

Very thrilling and dramatic were the events which led up to the disastrous war between Sienna and Florence. The Siennese, being fully aware of the danger in which they stood, accepted with acclamation the envoys of King Manfred, who came to promise them support and future protection without tyranny. They sent to Manfred some of their most distinguished statesmen and orators to plead for a closer alliance, which he granted on condition that the *podestà*, or mayor, and the military governor, should take an oath of fealty to him in the name of the townspeople. This was done, and very soon there clattered into the narrow, roughly-paved streets of Sienna, the Count Giordano d' Anglona, Vicar-general of Manfred, with a cortège of eight hundred men-at-arms, mounted on Flemish chargers and glittering with armour. Behind them came a large body of trained infantry, leather-clad and bearing long pikes

and clubs; and the people of Sienna, while making hospitable preparations, saw, with mingled feelings of pride and fear, their powerful guests consorting with their own small city-guard.

Soon war began in earnest, and the Florentine army showed such energy and skill in striking the Siennese and their Imperial allies wherever they were least prepared, that the prospects seemed all in favour of Florence. Then, becoming careless, the Florentines were worsted in some small engagements, and the Siennese began making incursions into Florentine territory, and burning and destroying crops and villages. Presently they thought of a device whereby to betray their enemies. They sent secret messengers to Florence, who pretended that they had been sent by the Florentine refugees in Sienna. These had become tired, they said, of the overbearing ways of the military governor, and sought to return to their own city. They promised assistance if the Florentine army would at once attack Sienna and force a battle; but this mission merely cloaked their real design, for they were in secret communication with the Ghibellines within Florence, and were plotting to bring half the army over to their side as soon as the engagement should begin. The treacherous plan was successful, and in the battle of Montaperto, a height outside Sienna, the Florentines were completely defeated with sore loss of life. The survivors of the Guelfic families of any importance fled from the city, and the allied armies of Sienna and their Ghibelline supporters marched into Florence.

Ambassadors were despatched to King Manfred to thank him for his aid; a Ghibelline and imperialist general was made *podestà*, and a large body of the German troops were quartered in Florence. By this



victory the growing power of Manfred in Tuscany was greatly increased, and he and his supporters determined to make it impossible for the Guelfs again to become supreme. A great congress was summoned, at which plans were to be devised by which King Manfred should be able to hand over a completely united Tuscany to his young nephew, Conradine. A daring proposal was made by representatives of Sienna and Pisa that to ensure this happy result the city of Florence should be utterly destroyed, since in it the Guelfs had always predominated, and only now temporarily were the Ghibellines in power. Then Farinata degli Uberti, Ghibelline as he was, uprose and protested fervently against so wicked and ruthless a crime. Dante shows us him in the shades of the *Inferno* amongst the Heretics, and gives a noble protest from his mouth :—

“ ‘ I was not there alone,’ he said, ‘ nor certes  
Without cause would I have moved with others ;  
But when all wished to ruin Florence, then  
I *was* alone, and stood in her defence,  
With open undisguisèd countenance.’ ”

*Inferno. x.*

For a few months Florence, under the energetic vicar-general of Manfred, was the great centre of Ghibelline activity. Troops from there harassed continually all the towns of Guelfic sympathies, till only Lucca was left. Then the scattered party sent embassies to the young Conradine, as the real sovereign of Sicily, imploring him to protect them from the “ usurper ” Manfred and his supporters. But the little lad was no soldier, and his mother the Empress refused to send him as a leader ; though, in token of sympathy with distressed subjects, she despatched to them, as a symbol, his fur-lined mantle. This the citizens of Lucca exhibited in

a casket, and organised processions to stir the patriotic fervour of all true Guelfs.

In the meantime the death of the peace-loving Pope Alexander IV. led to the creation of the new pontiff, Urban IV., who resented the arrogance and daring of King Manfred. Like his father, the Emperor Frederic II., Manfred scorned the Church ; and besides showing this in his high spirited insolence and levity, he deliberately offended the Christian thought of Europe by having an army of Saracens in his employ. In his contempt for the Papal dignity he had gone so far as to permit his envoy to Rome, at the enthronement of the new Pope, to be accompanied by a bodyguard of these Moorish soldiers. For this affront Urban denounced him, and published a crusade against him throughout his dominions, ordering him to appear at Rome to answer for his many sins against the Christian faith. This action at Rome intensified the bitterness of the strife between Guelf and Ghibelline throughout almost the whole of Italy, though the latter were much the stronger, and Manfred far more powerful than the Papacy in outward things. But the Pope was determined to subdue the haughty persecutor of the Church, and, pronouncing him outlaw, offered his realm to the young son of Louis IX. (Saint Louis) of France. This monarch declined the gift as it was the heritage of Conradine, but Count Charles of Anjou, to whom the Pope next offered it, was less scrupulous ; and, after gathering a large army, he marched to Rome to have his title publicly proclaimed. There he was acknowledged King of Sicily and Naples, and presented also with the dignity of Senator of Rome.

The exiled Florentine Guelfs hastened to acknowledge the Pope's representative, and placed a troop of four

hundred armed gentlemen and a body of infantry at his service. They implored the Pope to grant them some insignia, and he presented them with his own arms: a red eagle in a white field holding a green dragon in its talons. Above this the exiles placed the "lily" of Florence; red upon a white ground; and this "vermeil dyed" badge became henceforth the standard of the Guelf party. Charles of Anjou, "King of the Sicilies," acknowledging himself a vassal of the Church, had now to make good his claim by arms. With a large army of French soldiers and Italian levies, he marched through the pass of Ceperano, and crossed the frontier to meet the excommunicated Manfred, whose supporters and allies were rapidly falling away from him. Manfred sent an embassy of truce to meet Count Charles, who scornfully refused to treat with him, bidding the messengers, "Tell the Sultan of Nocera I will have nor peace nor truce with him: but that ere long I will either send him to hell, or he shall send me to Paradise."

At the river Benevento the two armies came in sight; a large body of archers under the command of Manfred's brother-in-law at once deserted, leaving only a few troops of Saracen soldiers. Then, according to the old historian, Manfred "behaved like a valiant gentleman, who preferred to die in battle rather than to escape with shame. And putting on his helmet, which had on it a silver eagle for a crest, this eagle fell on the saddle-bow before him. Seeing this, he was greatly disturbed, and said to the barons who were near him, '*Hoc est signum Deo.*' But he took heart and went into battle like any other baron without the royal insignia, and his forces were routed, and Manfred slain in the middle of the enemy." It is no astonishing or woeful thing for a warrior-king to die in battle, but this miserable ending

to a brilliant career is surrounded with shame and sorrow. Manfred's beautiful wife and her children were taken prisoners at Nocera in Sardinia, and died in prison. His body as it fell on the battle-field lay unrecognised for days, and when at length discovered by a camp-follower the unfeeling fellow threw it across his ass and came shouting, "Who'll buy Manfred?"

Then it was taken to the Pavilion of King Charles, who asked the captive knights in turn if that was Manfred. Most answered timidly, as if ashamed to own him, but a certain Count Giordani smote his hand upon his brow and cried, "O my lord, my lord!" This the Breton gentlemen highly commended, and they asked that Christian burial might be granted. The king replied, "Willingly I would do it if he were not excommunicated": so he ordered the body of Manfred to be buried by the bridge of Benevento, and each one of the army cast a stone upon his grave. Thus a great cairn was raised above him; no unworthy memorial to a military chief.

But afterwards the Bishop of Cosenza had the body removed and sent out of the kingdom "because it was Church land," and he an arch-heretic in life and ex-communicate. Says the old historian, "If it had not been for his ambition he might be compared with the most famous captains of past ages; magnanimous, energetic, liberal, and a lover of justice: he violated the laws only to ascend the throne, but in everything else he was just and compassionate. Learned in philosophy, a consummate mathematician; not only an encourager of literature but himself most accomplished. He was fair and handsome, of gentle aspect, always smiling and cheerful, of admirable and delightful wit, so that he has by several been compared to Titus, son of

Vespasian, for his liberality, his beauty, and his courtesy.”  
And Dante says,

“Blonde was he, beautiful, and of noble aspect,  
But one of his eyebrows had a blow divided.  
‘Now behold,’ he said,  
And showed me high upon his breast a wound.

“‘After I had my body lacerated  
By these two mortal stabs, I gave myself  
Weeping to Him, Who willingly doth pardon.

“‘Had but Cosenza’s pastor, who in chase  
Of me was sent by Clement <sup>1</sup> at that time  
In God read understandingly this page,  
The bones of my dead body still would be  
At the bridge head ; near unto Benevento,  
Under the safe-guard of the heavy cairn.  
Now the rain bathes and moveth them the wind,  
Beyond the realm, almost beside the Verde,  
Where he transported them with tapers quenched.’ ”  
*Purgatorio* iii.

<sup>1</sup> Pope Urban IV. had been succeeded by Clement IV.



## XI

# The Story of Sordello

1200-1269

"The chroniclers of Mantua tired their pen  
Telling how Sordello, Prince Visconti, saved  
Mantua ; and elsewhere notably behaved ;  
As Knight, Bard, Gallant, men were never dumb,  
In praise of him. . . ."

BROWNING.

**I**N the early years of the thirteenth century near Mantua, the native place of Virgil, stood a great Castle with the little village of Goïto clustering about it. It was the home of the Count Eccelino da Romano, Lord of the Marches, warden and suzerain of the Emperor's dominions in Italy, and mighty Ghibelline. He was often far from home on his business of peaceful government or war, and the Countess Adelaide and her step-daughter, the Lady Palma, lived a peaceful, uneventful life in the frowning castle. On any bright Spring morning, and through the long Summer days, might be seen, looking from the battlements, or wandering about the hill-sides, a lad in a green page's dress, with dark flowing hair and thin, delicate face.

He had never known any other home than this, for he was an orphan, the son of a Captain of the Archers in the guard of Count Eccelino, who had lost his life in saving the Countess and her infant son from death. In

one of the many quarrels between Guelfs and Ghibellines, the Eccelini palace at Vicenza had been set on fire ; and but for the courage of Ser El Cort, chief archer, they would have lost their lives. The Countess, in gratitude for his devotion, took charge of his little son, and had him brought up as a page in her castle at Goïto.

The young Sordello had few companions, and found his greatest pleasure in the flowers and trees, the birds and insects, and the stories he made up for himself about them. Sometimes on winter evenings travelling minstrels would seek hospitality in the Castle, and sing their songs and tell exciting stories of adventures and gallant deeds. Most eager of listeners was Sordello, and, like Bertrand de Born, of whom we have heard already, he early resolved that he, too, would be both knight and troubadour ; would do fine and noble deeds, and sing tender and moving songs. In those long-ago days no one was burdened with too many books ; and stories were, perhaps, cherished the more, because they were not written down but carried in the memory. They were not all of them stories of earlier times and imaginary heroes, but narratives of what was going on in the great, busy world, where Emperor and Pope and soldiers and crusaders strove and marched and fought. The thought of all this fired Sordello to the resolve that he would be one of the great and fearless ones of the earth, able to accomplish whatever he wished, and to command the admiration and respect of other men.

At that time the Christian imagination was much stirred with the great ideals and daring deeds of the Crusaders. We may picture the lonely boy climbing the steep rocky paths of the mountains and practising his archery with the pleasant make-believe that he was a "Soldier of the Cross." His love for music and verse

gave him mastery of tunes and songs ; and his thoughtful fancy set him trying to compose melodious lines such as rang in his memory when minstrels sang some of the famous lyrics of the Provençal troubadours. For at this time, in Lombardy as in Tuscany, there were no fine poems in the native dialect ; whilst the language of Provence, a district which was afterwards to become part of France, was enriched by much stirring and romantic verse. Occasionally there would come into young Sordello's hands a little folded book or parchment with a written version of some poem, and he practised constantly the art of saying things in the same dainty and expressive way. Unlike Dante, he did not attempt to write in his native dialect, and thus to do for Mantuan what Dante did for Tuscan ; instead he used the pleasant, musical, Provençal language.

The years passed and Sordello became a young man of eighteen or nineteen, and still he lived on in the quiet Castle, and had as yet achieved no beginning of the distinguished career he had determined upon. Like many young men who live in beautiful countries he was thoughtful, and not so fond of mirth and gaiety as of quiet reflection ; and in accordance with the poetic fashion of the time he secretly devoted himself to the Lady Palma, the step-daughter of the Châtelaine, composing songs and lays in her honour, and hoping for some distant day when he might make known his knightly service.

At length an opportunity came. The ladies left the Castle one bright day in Spring and journeyed to Mantua, where the Countess was to preside with Palma at a festivity known as a Court of Love. It was to celebrate the betrothal of the Lady Palma to Count Richard of S. Boniface, and many poets and troubadours were expected to attend. Sordello's gift and his ambition

were as yet not widely known, and he had not thought of entering the contest on so great an occasion. But after the ladies had departed, as he wandered restlessly about the Castle demesne, he found himself nearing the Mantua road; and presently strode along towards the gay city, picturing himself as the hero of the occasion. Soon he came within sight of the pavilions and the gaily dressed nobles and ladies, and saw the famous troubadour Eglamor enter the lists with his lute. Drawing near, Sordello listened to the poet's treatment of his story, thinking how he would have woven it differently. The subject was "Beauty," and Eglamor had sung nobly, inspiring the listening men and women to care for the inner beauty of spirit as well as the outer beauty of person; of sacrifice and patience as well as of courage and achievement. The applause rang loud when he ceased, and then Sordello advanced, and, taking the same subject, sang with spirit and vigour what he conceived to be the real service of Beauty. The listening judges and people were won, and amidst universal plaudits Sordello was acclaimed victor and led forward to the dais. There the beautiful Palma placed her silk scarf upon his neck with her own hands, and he became the hero of the festivity.

Thus the first step was taken in the path of his poetic ambition, and very pleasant were the greetings and adulation showered upon him. But the success which had brought triumph to him had meant defeat to Eglamor, who, while ungrudgingly acknowledging Sordello's mastery, was heart-broken at his own failure, and died the next day. The funeral procession, as it wound through the forest paths, was met by Sordello roaming in pleasant meditation. Generously distressed at the suffering inflicted on Eglamor by his own success,



SORDELLO'S TRIBUTE TO THE DEAD EGLAMOR





he followed the bier to the grave, and laid the victor's crown of laurel which he had received upon the quiet breast of the dead poet.

Soon afterwards he received an invitation from the grandees of Mantua, asking him to come and live amongst them, and give the Mantuans some more of his wonderful poetry. He resolved to go, and soon became the admired ornament of the aristocratic life of the city. But the change from the long quiet days at Goïto, and the loss of the high woods and the still beauty of nature, made poetry seem difficult and remote. So that Sordello sometimes found himself merely copying the sayings and the refrains of other singers, including the dead Eglamor. But the people praised him greatly, and accepted his work as wonderful and true, so that he consoled himself for the lack of worth in it with the praise and compliments which he received. Sometimes he determined to shake off this idle satisfaction, and to write something of splendid worth ; but the effort was too great, and again he would accept honour and commendation for some borrowed style or story. By degrees he became critical of the appreciation shown ; and questioned whether those who listened to his characters understood that *he*, since he created them, was greater than they.

It cost him, indeed, much angry pain when he found that his hearers looked past him, the singer, and thought of, and praised, only the subject or the characters of his story.

Then there came a day when his benefactress, the Countess Adelaide, died ; and the Count, worn out with toil and fighting, determined to marry his two sons to great heiresses and his daughter Palma, either to Count Richard, to whom she had been betrothed, or to his rival,

and then himself retire to a monastery to spend his last days in peace. Sordello was to compose songs and odes for the week of the celebrations, and he wandered into the forest towards Goïto, nestling under the high castle, presently finding himself in his old haunts where he had dreamed his day-dreams. When, after the banquet at the Eccelini palace in Mantua, the poet was called for, he could nowhere be found; and indeed he was pensively recalling the past in the drearily empty castle, and was never again to return to Mantua.

After some days a wandering minstrel came to Goïto, bearing a message for Sordello. The Count's two sons had duly wedded the ladies of their father's choice, but Count Richard was being held captive in Verona by the Guelfs, and the Lady Palma had need of help. Sordello set off at once, and found that some of his boyish dreams were likely to come true. For the Lady Palma cared not for any haughty Count, but for him, the poet, and had been thinking how to help and advance him ever since his victory at the Court of Love. Since her brothers had married into great Guelf houses, she purposed that she and Sordello should lead the Ghibellines, and restore the cause for which her father had toiled so long. It seemed to Sordello that perhaps in this way, and not in writing poems, he was to achieve the greatness that should be his. But he was resolute to achieve it nobly, and tried to decide whether Guelf or Ghibelline were the more worthy, and which would better serve to give the people freedom. While he pondered some one asked him to make a Ballad of the old Roman story of Crescentius Nomentanus, who in the tenth century devoted his life to freeing Rome from the Saxons.

His heart was moved and his imagination fired with

the thought, not merely of writing a Ballad upon such a hero, but of actually becoming one himself, by helping the Lombardians to gain their liberty. But which was the tyrant? Emperor or Pope? And which cause meant freedom for the people? Guelf or Ghibelline? He thought of Charlemagne, the great Emperor, and of Hildebrand, the great Pope; and how both these had accomplished something; yet of the two Hildebrand had done more. This seemed to show that the Guelf cause was the one he must support, and, his resolution taken, he sought an audience of Count Salinguerra in the hope of winning him, too, to support the Papacy. The burly Count, however, was in no mind to change his allegiance; but professing himself weary, like his great leader, Count Eccelino, offered him the position of Vicar to the Emperor, and flung the embroidered badge around his neck. Sordello felt himself tempted to accept it; to lead the Ghibellines, and, with Palma, win fame and glory as one of the deliverers of the world. Yet, in his heart, he had felt that the Guelf cause it was which claimed him; and after a tormenting struggle he resolved to be true to this idea, although all outward circumstances pointed to his winning greater distinction as a Ghibelline leader. When Count Salinguerra returned for his decision Sordello had flung the Imperial badge at his feet, and was meditating how further to show that he had made his final choice. No opportunity seemed to offer itself for active work; Palma's hopes were destroyed; her brothers, Ser Icellis and Ser Albries could not yet entrust this new supporter with any mission. They induced their sister to wed Count Richard, and she became Countess of Provence, and a great lady and powerful. Sordello wandered about Italy, now and then resting in some large town, and

watching the turmoil and quarrelling in which people seemed to spend their lives, but more often journeying from castle to castle. In these the noble and courtly hosts and their retainers welcomed troubadours of every degree, and listened to their songs and declamations without question of the poet's politics.

Later, Sordello reached Count Richard's castle in Provence, and there renewed the painful pleasure of his early dreams and later renunciation. The Countess Palma and her husband were very gracious to him, and gave him a castle and estate wherein to dwell. Always grave and silent, he became more silent still save for the expression of his thoughts and visions in rather sombre verse. For his poetry he was much esteemed, younger singers studying his verses to find wherein their charm lay ; and men of all degrees paid him respect and honour. He wrote an Elegy on the great Provençal baron-poet, Blacatzio ; and in it, whilst praising the courage of the dead man, he rebuked the sovereigns and princes of Christendom for their lack of virtue, charging them to "eat of the heart" of the hero of his song, in order that they might emulate his valour. Also in a book, "The Treasure of Treasures," he greatly commended those who had set behind them personal pride and self-advancement, and had devoted themselves entirely to some great endeavour. When he died many wrote funeral songs upon him, so that although he had failed to do the great things of which he had dreamt in his youth, he had yet won fame.

Dante shows us him in the shades of Purgatory near, and yet withdrawn from, faulty rulers who were not heart-whole in their intentions. Virgil points him out to his companion as—



# The Story of Sordello

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“ A soul that, stationed  
All, all alone, is looking hitherward ” ;

and Dante describing his appearance, exclaims,

“ O Lombard soul,  
How lofty and disdainful thou didst bear thee,  
And grand and slow in moving of thine eyes ! ”

When Virgil asked him to direct them he cried,

“ O Mantuan, I am Sordello  
Of thine own land ” ;

and the two poets, in life separated by twelve centuries, embrace each other in the realm of spirits. Then leading them along a terrace, Sordello shows them, across a lovely valley, the stately figures of Kings and Emperors and rulers : Rudolph I., with “ semblance of having left undone what he ought to have done ” ; Ottocar II., King of Bohemia, and Wenceslas his son ; Philip the Bold, of France ; Henry of Navarre ; Peter of Aragon ; Charles of Anjou ; and Henry III. of England. With the mind and spirit of Sordello Dante himself had much sympathy, and he recognises the real greatness of the man, who was “ gentle of manner, beautiful of person, and valiant of spirit.”

## XII

### Charles I. of Anjou

1216-1283

“When the race  
Of ancient kings had vanished, all save one . . .  
To Italy came Charles ; and for amends,  
Young Conradine, an innocent victim, slew.”

*Purgatorio* xx

**I**T has been pointed out that for two centuries and a half, from 1060-1316, there was either a Louis or a Philip on the throne of France. In the year of Dante's birth, 1265, King Louis IX., known after his death as S. Louis, was reigning. He was the son of King Louis “the Lion,” for in mediæval times an apt nickname was attached to all striking characters. These royal descendants of the great Hugh Capet were mostly strong and able men, and determined rulers ; but S. Louis was of gentler disposition than most, and his younger brother, Prince Charles of Anjou, possessed more of the militant qualities of his ancestors.

In the tenth and eleventh centuries Anjou was one of the most powerful of the provinces of France. It had a succession of resolute and determined rulers in the descendants of a certain Tostulf the Forester, who, in the ninth century, fought for King Charles the Bold against the Danes, and was ennobled and given a large strip of territory for his services. His son Fulk

the Red, and again his son Fulk, were mighty warriors too ; known too as Fulk the Good and Fulk the Black.

A further incentive to the ambition of this prince arose out of his connection with the noble Raymond Berenger, Count of Provence. This great baronial district to the South East of France proper was a civilised country with a literature of its own earlier than any other in Europe ; and its ruler in the beginning of the thirteenth century was almost independent of his suzerain, the King of France, and was of ancient and honourable lineage. Count Raymond's eldest daughter, Margaret, was wedded to the Crown Prince (afterwards Louis IX.), whilst the second daughter became the wife of King Henry III. of England. Beatrice, the youngest, was espoused to Count Charles ; and she encouraged her husband in his ambitious projects, since her sisters were both of queenly rank while she herself was but a Countess.

The death of the Emperor Frederic II. had removed the most powerful ruler of the time. His son King Manfred of Sicily was trying to conquer the rest of Italy ; and the Pope, declaring that he had forfeited the crown of Sicily, commissioned the Count of Anjou to oppose him. This occurred in the year of Dante's birth. The gallant and daring young ruler, however, was not the man to give up his kingdom without a struggle, and all the Ghibellines of Italy were on his side. Similarly the Italian Guelfs supported Charles, and hundreds of Tuscan gentlemen joined his army.

Not only political prejudice but also religious feeling strengthened the Guelfic opposition to King Manfred. Like his father, the debonair Emperor Frederic II., he adopted a luxurious and Eastern manner of life which justly offended Christian morals. This had led to his condemnation by the Pope, and Count Charles availed

himself of the strong feeling against Manfred when he refused to consider a truce and sent the insulting message, "Tell the Sultan of Nocera that with him I will have nor peace nor truce, but that ere long I will either send him to hell or he shall send me to Paradise."

In the battle which ensued, Count Guido de Montfort, a young son of the famous Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, led a regiment of Provençal cavalry in Anjou's army, and close behind marched a band of Florentine exiles, mounted and armed, bearing their new standard. Beautifully emblazoned on a white ground there shone a red eagle holding a green dragon in its talons.

A striking feature of Manfred's army was his troop of Saracen soldiers, armed with bows and arrows, and massed behind them was the heavy German cavalry. Each side shouted its battle-cry defiantly as they advanced: "Montjoie Chevaliers!" came from the Angevins, and "Suabia Chevaliers!" from the Germans.

The defeat and death of King Manfred left Count Charles in a fair way towards supremacy in Italy if he could win the complete support of all the Guelfs. So we find him visiting Florence in company with his Florentine troop, and being received with great honour, and a proposal that he should become Lord of Florence for ten years. At the same time the Pope proclaimed him Vicar-General of Tuscany, and the Guelfs became supreme in nearly all the towns. The principal Ghibelline cities were Pisa, Sienna and Pistoia, and they stood outside the new Guelfic League; and when, two years later, Conradine, the young Emperor of Germany, marched into Italy, they raised a large army and much money in his behalf.

A disastrous battle took place amongst the Abruzzi mountains, in which Conradine and his generals were

defeated and taken prisoners. Rarely in those wild times did a conqueror treat a fallen foe with generosity, and Count Charles was of too severe and fierce a temperament to grant any advantage in a contest. So, a few weeks later, he ordered that the young Emperor, who was but a lad of seventeen, should be tried for heresy and treason. The famous lawyer, Guido de Suzaria, argued for him, and only one judge could be found who would sentence him, but this one was enough for his powerful enemy, and Charles ordered him to be beheaded in the market-place of Naples.

Conradine had expected far different treatment, since he, like so many other monarchs of the time, had fought only for his throne, and he was playing chess with his trusted fellow-prisoner, Duke Frederick of Austria, when the message came. He indignantly upbraided the Count who brought it, and when the sentence was read to him he cried, "Slave! do you dare to condemn as a criminal the son and heir of kings? Does not your master know that I am his equal? He is no judge of mine!" Of course the remonstrance was wasted, as was the plea of Conradine that his generals should not share the same fate, since they fought not for themselves but for him. When the dreadful day of executions came, Conradine was led last to the scaffold. As he knelt down he murmured, "O my mother! how deep will be thy sorrow this day!" Bravely he died, and his revengeful victor forbade that any of the bodies of these "heretics and traitors" should be buried in consecrated ground. Thus in shame and misery ended the line of the Suabian Emperors, the "blasts of Suabia," as Dante calls them.

The vindictive sentence was followed by many executions of nobles who were, or were suspected of being,



Ghibelline sympathisers ; nor did Count Charles restrain in any way the cruelty of his supporters. One instance of the violence of the age is shown in the murder of a young English prince. The two sons of Richard, Duke of Cornwall, brother of King Henry III., were at a service in the church of San Silvestro in Viterbo, when young Guy de Montfort stabbed Prince Henry to the heart in revenge for the death of his uncle, Earl Simon of Leicester. Remembering as he left the church that the Earl's body had been treated irreverently at his death, he strode back and dragged his dying victim by the hair of the head, down the aisle, and to the steps of the building. Prince Edward carried home the heart of his murdered brother in a casket, and it was placed on a column on London Bridge, then the only bridge over the Thames ; and afterwards, when the rebuilding of the Abbey was completed, it was placed in the hand of the statue of King Edward the Confessor, where it remained for many years.

Dante refers to this, and shows us Guy de Montfort in the Seventh Circle of Hell, where the Violent are punished,

“ He in Gon's bosom smote the heart  
Which yet is honour'd on the banks of Thames.”

Count Charles made no attempt to check de Montfort, and showed plainly that he cared only for the increase of his own power. By the year 1271 he was acknowledged King of the Sicilies, Senator of Rome, Vicar-General of Tuscany, and chief Leader for the Church throughout Italy. He seems to have been something like Oliver Cromwell in character : stern and unbending, but most wise and prudent in counsel ; untiring and resolute in war ; purposely rough and overbearing in

manner, desiring always to make men fear ; speaking little and then with great suddenness and severity. He rarely smiled, and cared nothing for ease or good living, or pleasure, or songs and shows. He was tall and strong in frame, fierce and frowning of countenance, with a large, prominent nose, and dark-skinned almost as a Moor.

As Vicar-General of Tuscany he was responsible for the peace of the towns, and it was his province to select yearly the *Podestà*, or Mayor, generally a foreign nobleman, to hold the balance between the Guelf and Ghibelline parties. Although favour was shown to the Guelfs, yet the towns thrived under the control of Charles, and as he interfered little in details many of them became almost Republics. Florence was one of those which made great progress ; her trade and wealth increased enormously ; and the Florence of Dante's affectionate memory, with its palaces and towers and many sacred buildings is the city as it was in his childhood and youth. There still stands an old palace, dark, frowning, gloomy, which, when Dante was a boy, was built for the Guelfic Council. In its walls were dealt with the painful matters of confiscation of Ghibelline lands and houses, and the political measures which were to suppress and chasten that fallen party. At the same time, the citizens of Florence were careful not to let King Charles become too powerful. Sometimes they appealed to the Pope against him ; then, when the Pope appeared to be exercising too much temporal power, they sheltered themselves under Charles. Also the Guelfs in Florence were never really subdued, but bided their time, and took the opportunity of asserting their power when they could.

The Ghibelline towns in Tuscany and elsewhere refused to acknowledge the authority of Charles to appoint their

*Podeste*, and he had to compel them by force of arms, or else pay no attention to their insubordination. Few, however, were so well-governed or made such progress as Florence. An old writer says that in the early years of King Charles' power, "Such was the tranquillity of Florence that the city gates stood unlocked by night."

In Sicily things were very different. There the people longed for the days of King Manfred, beloved and admired by all. The stern and merciless Charles was determined to revenge himself upon them for their sympathy with Conradine. So he inflicted heavy taxes and harsh restraints, and put the island under military rule, garrisoning it with his Angevin troops. The Sicilians chafed under the continual oppression, and at length a terrible event put an end to it. During the Easter Celebrations in the year 1282 the citizens of Palermo attended Vespers at a famous church a little way outside the town. A French officer insulted a Sicilian girl who was going to the service in her bridal robes, and the neighbours drew their weapons and struck down the offender and his companions. A furious shout arose: "Death to the Frenchmen!" and the whole population rose against their tyrants. Not only in Palermo was this the case, but all through the island the Sicilians attacked and slew the French. The uprising was grimly called, "The Sicilian Vespers," and it marked the overthrow of the Angevin ruler.

The revolt might not have had such conclusive results, but that King Charles had a quarrel with Peter, King of Aragon. This monarch had desired Sicily for himself, and was ill-content when Charles took possession of King Manfred's dominions. In character he much resembled our Richard I.; he was at once warrior and troubadour, and as proud of his songs as of his battles.

We read that when King Philip the Bold of France invaded Aragon in 1270 her sovereign composed a song, and sent it as a plea for help to Gascony.

Dante does honour to this side of his character in depicting him as improvising or reciting verse while his spirit is one of those of Kings and rulers dwelling in the flowery valley scooped out of the mountain of Purgatory. Two sovereign souls stand apart :—

“ He, so robust of limb, who measure keeps  
In song with him of feature prominent,  
With every virtue bore his girdle braced. . . .”

Thus Dante links Charles I. of Anjou with Peter the Great of Aragon, whom he praises highly in order to emphasise his condemnation of the degenerate descendants who succeeded him. In life Peter and Charles were bitter rivals, and they are remembered as being almost the last of the many kings who sought to settle their quarrels by wager of battle. The contest did not, however, take place, for Peter presented himself some weeks too soon before King Edward I. of England, who had consented to sit as adjudicator at Bordeaux, had arrived, and then rode away protesting that he had fulfilled his engagement. When, on the proper day, Charles attended fully armed at the lists, he proclaimed the absent Peter a coward and no knight.

Another cause of quarrel between the two kings remains to be stated. There was living at the court of the King of Aragon a Sicilian nobleman who had been friend and physician to King Manfred, and had fought in young Conradine's army at the time of his defeat. This noble assured the king that a matter of common rumour was true ; to the effect that the Emperor Conradine had, from the scaffold, thrown down his

glove amongst the people, to be sent as a token to his sister Constance, wife of King Peter. This gage the noble asserted he had himself picked up and preserved. It was a point of honour, therefore, with the King of Aragon to seek to take from the Angevin Count, whom he considered a usurper, the crown of Sicily, so dear to Conradine and Manfred. So, when the news of the Sicilian Vespers reached Aragon, the king sent a fleet and an army to complete the overthrow of his enemy, and thus Sicily became part of his dominions.

King Charles usually lived at Messina when he was in Sicily, and it might have been expected that the city of his court and his palace would remain faithful to him. But there, too, the national spirit was strong, and even Messina revolted. Charles, in his wrath, vowed that if he "could live a thousand years he would go on razing the cities, burning the lands, and torturing the rebellious slaves." He swore also to "leave Sicily a blasted, barren, uninhabited rock, as a warning to the present age and an example to the future." This terrible threat was not fulfilled, since the forces of the King of Aragon were too strong for Charles, and he was compelled to flee.

The war was conducted in a cruel way, both parties satisfying their long-standing hatred of each other by vindictive treatment of their captives. An old historian writes, "Many French ships were sunken in the sea beyond Naples by the fleet of Peter of Aragon, and many of King Charles' folk who had survived the fight, common folk and knights, nobles and barons, were blinded by their captors." He goes on to say, "Which vengeance was just and merited, for they are most proud and foolish, an accursed folk who despise almost all other peoples of the world; and especially do they scorn the



English and the Lombards (*i.e.* the Italians). And they afflicted the kingdom of Naples and Tuscany and Apulia, and took from the people their victuals without money and without price—corn and wine and milk and fish and flesh, capons and geese and hens, and whatsoever they found fit for food.” Later on, he tells a story of the insolent and overbearing way in which French officers behaved to the Sicilians, which led to such a general outburst on the occasion of the Easter festival. “A man of Parma had a most fair wife, and when she asked of the Frenchman she was serving the price of the goose he had taken, he refused her all payment, and struck her a sore stroke, saying, ‘Will that serve? or wilt thou that I smite thee again?’ Her husband coming in quaked with indignation, and herein was no marvel, for whereas she had been most perfect in form, now all the rest of her life she halted in her gait by reason of that stroke.”

The summing-up of this writer’s account is, “Wherefore I say that the rule of the French hath ever been most foul and cruel, and it is just that mishap should fall upon them and that they should be destroyed.” This feeling began to be shared by all the subjects of Charles as the news spread of the Sicilian Vespers, and he had to use the great army he had collected for the invasion of Greece to put down rebellion in his domains. Throughout Italy there was discontent: Florence was at strife with the Ghibelline town, Pisa, always her rival in commerce, and wherever the two parties were mingled the Guelfs were no longer sufficiently strong to suppress their opponents. Charles, angry at his losses, was more resolute than ever to hold the rest of his sovereignty, but would yield no point for the sake of winning men to his side, and so many fell

away. His proud, impetuous nature could not bear that other sovereigns, or even other individuals, should be commended for things which he felt able to do. It is told of him that when he was no longer young, and his position such that no single knight could hope to rival him, he chose to resent the praise which all men gave to a certain warrior of Campagnia. He insisted that he would fight this knight in single combat to show that he was the better man. In vain his son Charles tried to dissuade him, and urged that it was undignified for a monarch to disguise himself and enter lists *incognito*. Young Prince Charles quoted to him the famous words of the Eastern philosopher, "He that is high hath another higher, and there are others still higher than these"; but his father, consumed with military arrogance, determined to show that he was "highest of all" in battle.

In the contest King Charles was thrown, and lay unconscious. When he revived he was eager to renew the fight, and Prince Charles had difficulty in persuading him to give up the attempt: "Peace, father: the leeches say that two of the ribs of your body are broken," and the king had perforce to lie still till they were healed.

With much disgust King Charles heard tales of the prowess and daring of his successful rival, King Peter. This monarch, who was a man of romantic mind, as well as a gallant fighter, achieved an adventure, it is said, which in those days few essayed. Accompanied by a body of favoured knights he set out to climb one of the peaks of the Alps in order to see if the legends of the genii and spirits and other terrors of the snow-clad heights might be still true. A thunderstorm broke over the party before they were near the top, and most of the climbers "fell to the ground and became as dead men

for the fear and anguish which had come upon them." The king could not persuade them to climb any farther, and he pressed on alone. When he reached the summit he found a lonely, gleaming tarn in a dark recess. Into this he east a stone, and forthwith there arose from the sullen water a dragon of terrifying appearance, whose breath filled the air with vapour. On descending, the royal Alpinist was able, therefore, to confirm the stories of the terrors of the high mountains.

One of the gravest crimes laid to the account of King Charles was the poisoning of the saintly Thomas Aquinas, the "Angelic Doctor," as he was called. His words and teaching were distasteful to the Pope, whom Charles desired to please, and he took this means of ending his captive's imprisonment. Dante writes that this act of violence

"Sent the Angelic Teacher back to heaven."

Strangely enough the rival kings, Peter of Aragon and Charles, died in the same year. Peter's son Alfonso succeeded him, and after some delay Alfonso released Prince Charles of Apulia, who had been taken captive in the naval war off Sicily. Each sought to follow in his father's footsteps, but neither achieved a name equal to theirs. Prince Charles, who bore the title "King of Jerusalem," was lame, and hence became known as the "Cripple of Jerusalem." Dante describes how Virgil led him along the terraces bordering the Valley of the Kings, and recounted to him the greatness of each, and how their sons almost always were less worthy and renowned:—

"To Charles my words apply  
No less than to his brother in my song."

### XIII

## Cimabue and Giotto

1240-1302    1276-1336

“ In painting Cimabue thought that he  
Should hold the field, now Giotto has the cry  
So that the other's fame is growing dim.”

*Purgatorio xi. 94.*

**I**N order to understand something of the work of these two great contemporaries of Dante we must consider for a moment the earlier conditions of art. When in the first years of the thirteenth century, the Crusaders took Constantinople, or Byzantium, the great seat of Eastern civilisation and learning, many of the Greek scholars and artists travelled into Western Europe and reached Italy. There they helped to restore the gentler arts of peace, which two centuries of war and bloodshed had nearly destroyed. Very precious now are the remains of this early Greek art of Italy: the Church of S. Vitale at Ravenna, that of Sta. Maria Maggiore at Rome, and that of S. Mark at Venice, with some pale frescoes and broken mosaics, and a few paintings on panels, carefully stored in the great galleries of Europe; these are nearly all that there are.

The characteristic of this art was the great use made of symbolism, or the attaching of definite meanings to certain forms and figures. In buildings we find that

the simpler geometrical forms prevailed, the circular appearing continually in the dome and the round arch ; while triangles and squares, alone or in circles, or subdivided, were used in decorating surfaces. The circle signified perfection ; the triangle, the Divine Trinity ; and a special meaning was attached to certain numbers. Three, the Trinity ; five, the sacred wounds of Christ ; seven, the days of Creation, and so on. Symbols were also taken from natural objects, and in memory of Christian saints and martyrs, the things connected with their lives or sufferings were taken as their symbols. Thus the keys of S. Peter, the eagle of S. Mark, the grid-iron of S. Faith, the arrows of S. Sebastian, and the lily of S. Francis were the recognised emblems of the saints.

The Christian churches of the East were built with five aisles, commemorating the Crucifixion, though this was superseded by the three-aisle building, symbolising the Trinity ; and the main aisle opened under a lofty arch into a great transept, while high columns in immense numbers supported the framework of the vaulted roof. The surfaces of the walls within were decorated with mosaics and frescoes, the colours being pale and relieved with much gilding. The human figures were tall and thin, with dark, sad faces, and in stiff attitudes.

So that in the thirteenth century the painters of Italy hastened to learn from their Greek teachers the methods of making mosaics, painting, mixing colours, and decorating large surfaces. The Italians themselves had not lost the art of illuminating, but this was carried on almost entirely in the monasteries. They now learned to paint in fresco, with colours mixed with water and white of egg, *a tempera*, as it was called ; for not for two centuries yet was painting in oils discovered. There was as yet no attempt to draw real representations



of persons or of natural growths ; everything was treated in the way in which we now treat the flower or plant which is to be introduced in a " design " ; that is, there were strict rules, according to which each object must be conventionalised.

In the year 1240 there was born in Florence to the noble family of Cimabue, or Gualtieri, a little son. He was christened Giovanni, and grew up in the tall old palace near the Porta San Piero. When he was old enough he was sent to the school held in the cloisters of the Convent of Sta. Maria Novella, where a kinsman of his father taught Latin. He was a bright, intelligent boy, but did not make great progress with the subjects of the *Trivium*, Grammar, Rhetoric and Logic, because his thoughts would wander from constructions and arguments and dilemmas to something he cared for greatly. This was the depicting of objects, animals, and other fancies, on every scrap of blank writing material, tablet or slate that he could obtain. The rough surface of the cloister-walls served for charcoal drawings of the things he saw around him : boy-companions, calm lowing oxen, fine prancing horses, a market-woman's basket, barber's porch, or hurrying priest bearing the Sacred Host to some dying person.

The few school-books in use were, of course, handwritten ; large and heavy, and rarely entrusted to the pupils' keeping, but even on the margins of some of these the young Cimabue drew his representations of things. We do not read that he was either punished or discouraged for his devotion to this interest. When he was about eighteen years of age the *Podestà* and the Council of the City had invited some Greek painters to come and reside in Florence and undertake the decoration of the new churches. The principal work at-

tempted at first was the side chapels in the church of Sta. Maria Novella, and we read that young Giovanni Cimabue escaped at every possible opportunity from his studies in the adjoining convent to watch the painters at their work.

To his great joy his parents and friends decided that it would be well to apprentice him to these gifted workers, in order that he might completely master the art for which he showed such fondness. We may think of him for some happy years copying in the great arched chamber which served as studio to these foreign artists, and occasionally entrusted with a tiny detail of real work : an animal in a far corner of a fresco, or a leaf or flower in the traceried border of a panel. Presently his work excelled that of his teachers even in the two points of colouring and design ; and always his gift for representation had made his figures better than theirs. So that he, a native Florentine, began to be asked to assist in the great work of beautifying the city, and he was the leading artist of the day when Dante was born. He had his studio in a street adjoining the wonderful church of Sta. Croce, and pupils came to him to study his methods. He was also an architect and a worker in mosaic, but he won his greatest fame as a painter. We are told that, besides decorating with frescoes the choir of the church of Sta. Croce, making a portrait of S. Cecilia for her altar there, he painted a beautiful "Madonna" on a great panel for the Church of Sta. Maria Novella ; and that when it was finished it was carried to its place in a procession with banners, and bells, and singing, and all the townspeople joyfully following. Whence, ever after, the quiet old street was called the *Via Borgo Allegri*, as Mrs Browning sings,

" Even the place  
Containing such a miracle grew bold,

Named the 'Glad Borgo' from that beauteous face  
Which thrilled the artist, after work, to think  
His own ideal Mary-smile should stand  
So very near him. . . ."

To his studio came all the notables of Florence and distinguished strangers from other cities, including, we are told, Prince Charles of Anjou. There also came representatives from Sienna and from Pisa, begging him to come and embellish their churches. In the very year in which Dante was born Cimabue was appointed to finish the frescoes in the Church of S. Francis at Assisi, which had been begun by the painters with whom he had studied. There he worked, as the old historian relates, "*Con diligenza infinita*," covering the walls with scenes from the Old Testament and the New, and lovingly filling up spaces with geometrical designs and representations of flowers and fruit and wistful genii.

In character this gifted man seems to have been intensely proud and haughty, but quite single-hearted in his devotion to his art. If fault were found with any of his work while it was in progress, or if he were himself dissatisfied with it, he would paint it out, or destroy it, and begin entirely afresh. He loved the grand and majestic, and cared little for what was merely pretty; he was a great scholar, too, and knew much of the literature studied in his day.

In the year 1290 Cimabue, having occasion to travel from Florence to Vespignano, a small village and monastery some miles distant, saw a shepherd lad on the hillside tending his sheep. As he drew near he found that the boy was drawing with a sharp stone on the face of a rock, and that he was making a picture of one of his sheep. The great man drew near and found that the drawing was wonderfully correct and good,

and that the little shepherd loved nothing so well as trying to draw the objects he saw around him. This reminded Cimabue of his own boyish days, and the difficulty of obtaining parchment and charcoal. This lad, however, had greater difficulties ; for neither paper nor parchment came in his way. He had practised, as now, with a pointed stone on a smooth rock, or with a stick on sand, or the dust by the wayside ; and had already won some mastery with no one to help or teach him.

After some talk with the lad, Cimabue went with him to his father's hut ; and the poor herdsman agreeing to let him go, Giotto was asked, " Would he like to go to Florence and learn to draw instead of tending his sheep ? " The sturdy boy eagerly said " Yes," and followed Cimabue forthwith.

Besides working in his master's studio at drawing and painting, and accompanying him, bearing colours and brushes, to high platforms in churches and public buildings, Giotto had for tutor in other branches of learning the great scholar, Ser Brunetto Latini, and under his teaching mastered the " Trivium " and studied the Latin literature and Greek philosophy which formed part of a liberal education. A story is told of him during his apprenticeship which shows how unusual was his gift and how greatly it was admired. In the studio was an unfinished painting at which Cimabue worked at intervals ; and one day, during his absence, young Giotto painted in a fly on the face of the figure. Cimabue, on resuming work, attempted to whisk away the addition, thinking it was alive.

In 1302 the master laid down his brush for the last time, and died full of honour. He was buried in the church of S. Maria del Fiore, which he had himself

designed and helped to build and to adorn, and upon his tomb was graven the epitaph :—

“Cimabue thought himself master of the field of painting ;  
While living he was so ; now he holds his place among the stars of  
heaven.”

Of his many pupils, Giotto, the shepherd boy whom he had discovered and befriended, was the most famous. Cimabue recognised his genius, and, with true greatness of mind, welcomed the advance he made. He himself had been thought marvellous because he represented things naturally, but Giotto far excelled him. A writer of the day, speaking of this painter, points out with surprise and admiration that he could make personages in his pictures “who are in grief, look melancholy, and those who are joyous, look gay.” Like his great master, Giotto was commissioned to decorate many churches, palaces, and council-chambers ; and the first important piece of work which he undertook is said to have been the frescoes in the mayoral palace at Florence. In these allegorical pictures he introduced the portraits of the men of the day, and amongst them was that of Dante Alighieri, at that time Prior of his guild.

He carried on the paintings begun by Cimabue in the famous church of S. Croce, entirely decorating two of the chapels ; and his pictures of the Holy Family were greatly wondered at and admired, because he showed the little Jesus turning towards His mother with arms outstretched.

Not only was Giotto renowned as a painter, but also as a scholar, and a close observer of men and things. He was, however, plain in feature and unattractive in person, and was somewhat sensitive as to these dis-





GIOTTO THE PAINTER



advantages. Boccaccio, the Italian story teller, relates an incident concerning Giotto and a special friend of his, a great lawyer, Ser Forese da Rabatta, who was equally unattractive in appearance and almost deformed. Returning to Florence one day from their country villas they were overtaken by heavy rain, and for a time took shelter in a wayside cottage. The rain continuing, and the two friends being in a hurry to get home, their poor host provided them with two old threadbare cloaks and caps, and thus equipped they went their way. Struggling with wind, and wet and bespattered with mud, presently the comical side presented itself to Ser Forese. Bursting into a laugh, he exclaimed, "Do you suppose, Giotto, if a stranger were to meet you now that he would imagine you to be the best painter in the world?" Giotto's answer was ready and apt: "Yes, Forese, I think so; if when he looked at you he could guess that you knew your A B C."

At this time many of the cities of Italy were beginning to devote time and thought to other things than war, and especially to increasing the dignity and beauty of their buildings. Thus we find Giotto travelling to Pisa and Padua and Milan and Ravenna, and presently invited to Rome. Pope Boniface VIII. was pressing on the decoration of the Basilica of S. Peter's, and procuring the services of artists of all kinds. His ambassador, visiting Giotto with the Papal request, asked to be shown some specimen of the painter's skill. Giotto took up a sheet of paper, and with a single movement of his charcoal traced on it a circle so perfect that "it was a miracle to see." This so surprised and delighted the envoy that he was prepared to believe in Giotto's skill to the utmost, and the "round O of Giotto" became proverbial. He stayed at Rome some time, painting

many frescoes for the cathedral and for the Lateran palace, and making mosaics for the Basilica.

Amongst the great nobles visiting Florence who saw Giotto at work in his studio was the Duke of Calabria, son of King Robert of Sicily, and this monarch sent for him to Naples. He was himself an accomplished man and a patron of learning and the arts, and he received Giotto at his court with every honour, finding much pleasure in his conversation and ready wit. Visiting the painter one hot day at his work, the king said, "If I were you, Giotto, I would leave off work and rest myself."—"And so would I, Sire," replied the painter, "if I were *you*." Amongst the famous frescoes in the church of the Incoronati at Naples painted by Giotto is one showing a group of singing boys, and the natural postures and attitudes and the expression of the act of singing were considered so remarkable that the observers never ceased to wonder at them. One day King Robert, half in fun, half in compliment to Giotto's command of great subjects, desired him, "Paint me my kingdom." Giotto immediately sketched the figure of an ass with a heavy pack-saddle on his back, smelling at another pack-saddle on the ground laden with a crown and sceptre. The king understood the emblem, and appreciated the painter's fearless disregard of royal pretensions.

On his return to Florence the painter's time and thought were devoted to the designing and construction of the famous Campanile, or Bell-tower. Like his master, and like generations of the Italian artists, he was architect, sculptor and painter, and with his own hand he made many of the models for the statues and drew the designs of every part of the decorations. We read that when the Emperor Charles V. saw this beauti-

ful building, he declared that, "It ought to be kept under glass."

We have said that Giotto was scholar as well as artist, and his wide knowledge of history and literature, together with his vivid imagination, enabled him to paint, as it were, whole Bibles on the walls of churches and histories on the walls of palaces.

One of the most interesting of the many strange and beautiful buildings of this century was the Campo Santo at Pisa. This "sacred field" was an enclosed space, covered with earth brought from the Holy Land, with an arcade or cloister running its whole length. It contained three chapels, or chantries; and chapels and cloisters were all beautifully decorated by the finest art workers of the age. Many tablets and monuments commemorated the Pisan nobility and citizens; and in the central cloister was the famous sarcophagus of the lady Beatrice, mother of the Countess Matilda of Tuscany. The contribution of Giotto to this great undertaking was the painting of much of the cloister walls with the story of Job.

Besides being an artist and a scholar, Giotto was also a poet, and his verses which remain are of a joyous and vigorous kind. One is "A Song against Poverty," for he was of far too sincere a nature and upright a character to pretend to despise his high position and the consideration it brought him. Of his many pupils we read that a certain Taddeo Gaddi was his favourite, and that Tommaso di Stefano became the most famous, and was known as "Giotto," or "the little Giotto."

In the year 1336 Giotto died in his home at Florence; says the old writer, "Yielding up his soul to God as a good Christian no less than a good painter." He was buried, with a civic funeral and amid public lamentations,



near where his master lay in the church of S. Maria del Fiore.

The name of Giotto is one which, for many reasons, is worthy to be coupled with that of Dante. Both were intensely earnest workers, enthusiastic lovers of beauty and goodness, and each entirely transformed the art he practised—Giotto in painting, Dante in poetry. They were friends and companions during the few happy years of Dante's life, while he was yet powerful and wielding good influence in Florence. It is probable that Giotto professed himself to have no "politics," and thus in the strife of parties he escaped the storm which overwhelmed his ardent friend. Dante does not introduce Giotto or Cimabue in his portraits of the great ones in Purgatory, but only refers to them in his description of the poetry of his friend Guido Cavalcanti. This Guido was said to have excelled the poet Guido Guiccinelli, who died in the year that Giotto was born; and as an illustration the comparison of Giotto eclipsing Cimabue is given in the words quoted at the head of this chapter.

Part Three  
The Paradiso

*“ His glory, by whose might all things are moved,  
Pierces the Universe, and in one part  
Sheds more resplendence, elsewhere less. . . .”*

DANTE.

*“ Far off th’ empyreal heaven, extended wide  
In circuit, undetermined square or round,  
With opal towers and battlements adorned  
Of living sapphire . . .  
And fast by, hanging in a golden chain,  
This pendant world, in bigness as a star  
Of smallest magnitude, close by the moon. . . .”*

MILTON.

## XIV

# The Paradiso

ACCORDING to the Ptolemaic astronomy, which supposed the Earth to be the centre of the Universe, Dante represents Three great concentric spheres, or "Heavens" of space: (i.) the Planetary Heavens, (ii.) the Stellar Heaven, and (iii.) the Primum Mobile. Beyond this, mediæval Christian thought placed the Empyrean, or the Heaven wherein dwell God and His angels.

The Planetary Heavens are seven in number, in Three great divisions: (i) those within the Heaven of the Sun; (ii) the Heaven of the Sun; and (iii) those beyond the Heaven of the Sun. So that the journey through Paradise, starting from the Earthly Paradise, on the summit of the Mount of Purgatory, passes through the three nearer spheres of the Moon, Mercury and Venus; then through the sphere of the Sun; and then through the three farther spheres of Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. The travellers passing onward still go through the Heaven of the Stars, at the constellation of Gemini; then through the invisible vault beyond the Stars, the Primum Mobile; and, lastly, arrive at the Heaven of Light and Love.

Dante represents the different planetary spheres as connected with various qualities or virtues, and in them are manifested to him the spirits of the great departed

in whom those virtues or qualities were exhibited. In those nearest the earth are shown the spirits of those whom some stain of earth has marred; so that, though they are perfectly happy, their joy is less intense than that of those in the Heavens beyond the Sun. He also uses the lore of astrology, that great predecessor of astronomy; and considers each of the planetary Heavens as signifying some department of human learning. He explains this in his book the *Convito*: "To the first Seven correspond the seven sciences of the Trivium and Quadrivium; that is, Grammar, Dialectics, Rhetoric, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry and Astronomy. To the Eighth, that is the starry sphere, corresponds Natural Science, called Physics; and the first science, which is called Metaphysics. To the Ninth sphere corresponds Moral Science; and to the Heaven of Rest, the Divine Science, which is called Theology."

As Dante turns towards the Sun at the mid-day standing at the source of the stream Eunoë, he becomes conscious of a strange experience. He seems to be no longer in a human body or to tread earth; no longer to fill space but to penetrate the matter of the sphere he has entered, the Heaven of the Moon. Beatrice is his guide, and explains to him that, while on earth the law of gravitation controls matter, in the heavenly spheres the love and longing for God make all spirits seek His seat. Thus it is as natural to rise there as to fall on earth. From her Dante learns the order of the Divine Intelligences which rule the different spheres: the Seraphim controlling the Primum Mobile; the Cherubim, the sphere of the Stars; the Thrones, that of Saturn; the Dominions, Jupiter; the Virtues, Mars; the Powers, the Sun; the Principalities, Venus; the Archangels, Mercury; and the Angels, the Moon.





THE HEAVEN OF VENUS



Then he sees before him, as he thinks, reflections of human figures, and turns to see. Beatrice smiles at him for being thus in the spirit, and yet thinking in the old material way. She explains to him that those he sees are spirits who abide continually with God, but that they make themselves manifest in the sphere where he now stands, because the Heaven of the Moon is the place of the Inconstant. He speaks to one, asking, "Tell me, ye whose blessedness is here, do ye desire a more lofty place, to see more, or to make yourselves more dear?" and is told, "Brother, the quality of love stilleth our will, and maketh us long only for what we have, and giveth us no other thirst." He learns that the speaker is the Lady Piccarda Donati, sister of his friend Forese, and cousin of his own wife Gemma. The head of the Family, her brother Corso, had had her brought from the convent where she had retired, and had compelled her to marry. She shows Dante in the distance "another splendour," and tells him that the spirit is Constance, daughter of King Roger of Sicily, who was taken from the convent and married to the Emperor Henry V., son of Barbarossa.

They then ascend to Mercury, where they see the spirits of those who did great deeds for the love of fame; amongst them the Emperor Justinian, and Roméo the unknown counsellor of Raymond de Berenger. There Beatrice discourses to him of the marvels of Creation, of Goodness and of Free-Will; and choirs of angels sing, "Hosanna, Lord God of Sabaoth."

Next they reach the Heaven of Venus where are the spirits of lovers; and Dante recalls the ancient beliefs concerning Venus, whilst he watches the spirits moving in a wondrous dance. One approaches and reveals himself as Carlo Martello (Charles Martel) of Hungary, patron and benefactor of Dante in his early manhood.

He was the grandson of Charles I. of Anjou, and married the beautiful Clemence, daughter of the Emperor Rudolph. This lady was a most devoted wife, and is said to have fallen dead on being told of her husband's death. Near by stands Cunizza, a lady admired by Sordello the poet, whom she loved; and soon they meet Folchetto, the famous Troubadour of Marseilles. He was patronised and honoured by King Richard I. of England, King Alfonso of Aragon, and the great Count Raymond de Berenger of Toulouse.

The Three first Heavens passed, Dante reaches the Heaven of the Sun, presided over by Powers in the mystic order of the heavenly spirits and symbolising Arithmetic. In this sphere are made manifest the spirits of Fathers and Theologians, shining with so intense a brightness that they rival the sun itself. Beatrice charges Dante to thank God, who is the Sun of the angels; and he fixes his thought so completely upon this intention that he forgets Beatrice. She smiles upon him so benignly in her pleasure at this, and his mind again becomes distracted and his attention divided amongst many things. Then Twelve shining spirits form a circle round Dante and Beatrice, and one describes to him the rest. These great representatives of heavenly wisdom were King Solomon; Dionysius, the Areopagite; Boëthius, the Roman Senator under Theodoric; Paul Orosius, a writer of the fifth century; Isidore of Seville, of about the same time, who compiled a Cyclopædia of sacred learning; the Venerable Bede of England; Peter Lombard, the "Master of Sentences"; Gratian, a friar of S. Francis at Bologna; Richard of S. Victor, who "wrote a Book on the Trinity and many other beautiful and sublime works"; Albertus Magnus of Cologne; Sigebert, a learned monk, who, in the twelfth century,

lectured at Paris in the Rue de Fouarre, or Rue de l'École, the very cradle of the University ; and lastly, Thomas Aquinas, the Angelic Doctor, who is the speaker.

It is told of this saintly scholar that once he begged an audience of the Pope in order to plead for help from the Papal treasury for a mission. The Pope received him graciously, promised liberal donations, and added complacently : " The days are gone when the Church could say, ' Silver and gold have I none.' "—" Yes," replied Aquinas, " and when she could say, ' Take up thy bed, and walk.' " <sup>1</sup> He was a friar of the Order of S. Dominic, and the feud which existed in mediæval times between Franciscans and Dominicans is rebuked here, in that Aquinas declares the praise of the Franciscans.

Then a second circle of bright and shining souls group themselves around the former, like the parallels of a double rainbow. In it are seen Nathan the prophet, friend and counsellor of King David ; St John Chrysostom (Golden-Mouth) ; Donatus, a learned Father of the fourth century ; Rabanus, Bishop of Mayence in the eighth century, who compiled a Cyclopædia, *De Universo* ; Anselm, Prior of Bec and Archbishop of Canterbury ; Hugo of S. Victor, the teacher of Peter Lombard ; Peter, nicknamed " The Devourer of Books," whose paraphrase of the Scriptures was a treasured work in the Middle Ages, and who was Chancellor of the University of Paris when Anselm was Prior of Bec ; another Peter, " Hispanus," afterwards Pope John XXI., but known more widely from his treatise on Logic. In it appeared first the clever memory lines, " Barbara, Celarent, Darii," etc. There, too, is the mystic, Abbot Joachim of Calabria, who resigned his post as Abbot that he might devote himself entirely to study and

<sup>1</sup> Acts iii. 6 ; John v. 8.



meditation. We read that, "he passed his days and nights in writing and dictating: his secretary Lucas and two other monks writing in copy-books what he composed and dictated on scraps of paper." Two of the earliest and most ardent of the early followers of S. Francis are also in this group: Illuminato, who followed him to Egypt when he sought to preach to the Sultan; and Augustine, who, as he lay dying, suddenly cried out, "Wait for me! Wait for me! I am coming with thee!" and when the waiting brothers asked to whom he spoke, he replied, "Do ye not see our Father Francis?"

Lastly, there is the blessed Bonaventura, who describes the spirits of this outer ring. He, John of Fidenza, is hardly known except by the nickname which clung to him from infancy. Always a delicate child he was carried by his mother, very ill and thought to be dying, to be blessed by Francis of Assisi, who was believed to possess healing powers. The friar, gazing upon the baby sufferer, exclaimed, "O buona ventura!" commending the faith of the mother, and blessed the infant and prayed over him. He recovered and lived to become a saintly scholar and Franciscan, so illustrious in learning and so winning in speech that he was known as "The Seraphic Doctor." He kept fully the stern rule of his order as to poverty and plainness of life; and we read that when he had become General of it, and was being made a Cardinal, the Papal Nuncios, bearing the Cardinal's hat to him, found him washing the dishes after the mid-day meal. He wrote a Life of S. Francis, and a tradition tells us that it being unfinished when he died, he was permitted to return to earth for three days to finish it. He wrote many books besides; and one of the golden sentences for which he was renowned shows us something of the character of the man: "The best perfection of a

religious man is to do common things in a perfect way."

These two rings of happy spirits move around Dante and Beatrice in stately rhythmic motion, singing in honour of the Blessed Trinity. Then S. Thomas Aquinas teaches Dante yet more of the mysteries of knowledge, showing it as a faint reflection of the Divine Mind. In this difficult instruction by the Angelic Doctor occurs the curious reference to "Dame Bertha and Squire Martin," signifying the heedless and ignorant spectators; perhaps we may see in it the mediæval equivalent of our modern "man in the street."

Without conscious effort Dante is next translated to the Heaven of Mars, where are made manifest the spirits of Crusaders and Martyrs for the Faith. There blazes the Cross, the sacred sign; and there throng the spirits of the dauntless, like motes in a sunbeam, and sweet sounds of triumphant gladness fill all the space around. When the hymn ceases one of the spirits shoots like a falling star from his place to speak with Dante, who knows him for an ancestor of his, Cacciaguida, knighted by the Emperor Conrad for valour. He is represented as describing the glories of the Florence of the past, when the citizens lived simple lives, and were loyal to the Church and kind to each other; when family feuds and rival clans were unknown; and when great names, since dishonoured or decayed, were borne by men living devoted and upright lives. Then the spirit warns Dante of the sad future before him: bitter and painful in the enduring, but part of a harmonious and beautiful whole, in which although he suffers he must desire to bear his part. Florence shall exile him, and proclaim him outlaw; he will wander for refuge and shelter, and will find them in sorrow and uneasiness in the houses of great men.

He sinks into a reverie as he ponders on this revelation, and awakes to realise that he is now in the Heaven of Jupiter; and that instead of the glowing Cross he beheld before, he now sees spirits form themselves into letters of light, which spell out a counsel from the Book of Wisdom: "Love righteousness ye that be judges of the earth"; the closing letter slowly transforming itself into an Eagle, the Roman symbol of Law and Justice. In this planet, which Brunetto Latini described as "gentle and piteous and full of all good things," the Warrior-Saints, Charlemagne and Roland and Duke Godfrey and Robert Guiscard, who shone in the mystic cross, are replaced by those of just Kings of all ages. It seems to Dante that all unite in one voice to praise God and to extol His Wisdom and justice before which man's understanding fails; and they then record the virtuous kings of pre-Christian times, and denounce many of the contemporary sovereigns as unworthy. Then he realises that the figure of the Eagle upon which he gazes is, as it were, a constellation of spirits: the pupil of the eye is David, the poet-king of Israel; five make the eyebrow's arch, Trajan, Hezekiah, Constantine, William of Sicily and Ripheus of Troy. This Trojan hero is thus described in the *Æneid*, "Ripheus also falls, the most just among the Trojans, and most observant of the right"; but many wondered that Dante chose him rather than *Æneas* to represent the pagan souls in Paradise.

They next arrive at the Seventh Heaven, Saturn, where reside the souls of those who gave up their lives to meditation and silence. There stretches a golden ladder to heights which Dante cannot see, and lights and splendours glow upon it; but he misses the heavenly music which he has heard in each of the other

spheres. It is presently explained to him by a shining soul that his senses are not yet attuned to this higher music; and he learns that the speaker is one Peter Damiano, a monk of Ravenna in the eleventh century, also known as Peter the Sinner. Then he is spoken to by S. Benedict, who, in the sixth century, founded the monastery of Monte Cassino, midway between Rome and Naples. This was the most famous monastery, not only in Italy, but in the world. It had seen and endured from its mountain terraces the inroads of Lombards and Goths and Saracens; Normans and Spaniards and French have devastated the lands beneath. In its Library were stored letters of the Lombard kings, of Hildebrand, of the Countess Matilda; of Gregory the Great and of Charlemagne; and in the days of its splendour, its Abbot was the first Baron of the realm. In the latter years of Benedict's rule there he was joined by his Sister Scholastica, who desired, like him, to devote her life to God; and presently other women joined her, and thus was formed the first Benedictine community for women. Once a year her brother would visit her from his neighbouring monastery, and one day as he was praying in his cell he saw a white dove pass the grated opening, and learned soon afterwards that his sister was dead. Hence a dove is generally shown in pictures of S. Scholastica.

When S. Benedict rejoins his companion-spirits they all whirl back to Heaven; Beatrice bids Dante to prepare for the coming glory of the Eighth sphere. She charges him to gaze downward, and see how far he has left the earth behind. He obeys her, and can distinguish through all the seven spheres, and beyond, "the little earth for which we fight so fiercely stretched out before him so that he can trace the rivers from their watersheds to the



sea.”<sup>1</sup> Then, standing beneath the constellation Gemini, under whose sign Dante was born, he sees in that region of the stars a wonderful Vision of Christ in a garden of splendour of which the flowers are the Blessed Virgin and the Apostles. The angel Gabriel brings a crown of sapphire, and from all the shining lights come sounds of sweet melody. The Virgin Mother is to be taken to the highest heaven to share the final triumph of her Son; and one of the brightest spirits approaches from the height to prepare Dante for the last and most blissful stage. The soul is S. Peter, who holds the keys of Heaven, and he questions Dante on matters of Faith; and his fervent and humble profession so pleased the saint that he circled thrice, singing in blessing, above him; then S. James examines him on Hope and S. John on Charity. So dazzling is the spirit of S. John that Dante becomes blinded in gazing upon him, but his sight is restored to him by Beatrice. Then, while the brightness increases as the happy souls sing their Hymn of Praise, Dante and Beatrice ascend to the *Primum Mobile*, that great enwrapping sphere within which the measurements of time and space are possible. It is beyond these, girt only by the Divine Light and Love, thus Beatrice explains. Then is apparent to Dante’s bewildered sight a ninefold circle of fire, which, he learns, are the nine Orders of the Angels, revolving with great rapidity about an intensely luminous point at the centre. When Beatrice has enlightened his perplexity as to the angelic movements and the nature of the Love which they express, they emerge from this Crystalline Heaven into the Empyrean, the Heaven of Light and Love and Joy, the presence of God. “O splendour of God,” sings Dante, “whereby I saw the lofty triumph of

<sup>1</sup> Dent’s “Temple Classics” Dante: Mr Wicksteed’s translation.



the truthful realm, give me power to tell how I beheld it !  
A light there is up yonder which maketh the Creator  
visible unto the creature, who only in beholding Him  
hath its own peace."

Like the petals of a rose the ranks of the redeemed are  
seen with the angelic hosts hovering around. Milton's  
description in *Paradise Lost*, Bk. iii. reproduces the  
description of this climax of Dante's Vision :—

"About Him all the sanctities of Heaven  
Stood thick as stars, and from His sight received  
Beatitude past utterance . . ."

Dante turns to question Beatrice, but she is no longer  
beside him ; and one of the shining spirits comes forward  
to point his gaze to where she now abides. It is S.  
Bernard of Clairvaux, the great founder of the contem-  
plative order, and the writer of many beautiful hymns to  
the Name of Jesus. He prays to GOD that Dante may  
see fully and completely the wondrous power of Love ;  
and a wonderful insight is given to him in response to  
the prayer : so that he exclaims,

"Oh ! grace abounding, wherein I presumed to fix  
my look on the Eternal Light, so that within its depths  
I saw ingathered, bound by love in one volume, the  
scattered leaves of all the Universe ;" <sup>1</sup> and he ends his  
Book thus : "My desire and will were rolled—even as a  
wheel that moveth equally—by the Love that moves the  
sun and the other stars." <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dent's "Temple Classics" Dante : Mr Wicksteed's translation.

## XV

# Constantine the Great

274-337

“ Ah ! Constantine, to how much ill gave birth,  
Not thy conversion, but that plenteous dower,  
Which the first wealthy Father gain'd from thee.”

*Inferno xix.*

WHEN, towards the end of the third century A.D., the great Diocletian shared his Empire with his brilliant lieutenant, Maximian, with the title of Augustus, there were two great generals placed next to the Emperors in power with the imposing title of Cæsar. These were Galerius and Constantius. In order to protect the Roman dominions, and to keep peace within them, these sovereigns were each responsible for one part. To Constantius Cæsar fell Gaul, Spain and Britain ; and in his progress through the “ Western Isles ” he held his court at York. Soon after he became Cæsar he married the daughter of Maximian Augustus ; and when both Emperors abdicated, Constantius and Galerius succeeded them. For fourteen years Constantius reigned over his provinces, delighting especially in the soldierly qualities of his eldest boy Constantine, the son of his first wife. At his death, in the Imperial Palace at York, the army of the West at once proclaimed Constantine as Emperor Augustus, Cæsar of the West, Overlord of Gaul, Spain and Britain, and Commander of the Army of the Rhine. This was in the year 306.

His first task was to subdue the Franks who had invaded Gaul during the absence of his father, Constantius, in Britain. So resolute and terrible was the defeat which the new leader inflicted that it was long before the defiant enemy recovered ; and future attempts were guarded against by the building of a line of castles and fortresses beside the Rhine. War-galleys patrolled the river, and garrisons were stationed at its mouth ; and to make it easy to transport troops and provisions, a bridge was built over the river at Cologne.

Other difficulties which beset the path of the young Emperor were the jealousy and intrigues of his father's colleague Galerius ; the revolt of Italy on account of taxation ; the rivalry of Severus Cæsar, and the ambition of other generals of the Roman armies. But his courage and resolution were great, and his high spirit and gallant behaviour made him the idol of his troops. Many stories are told of the way in which the soldiers threw their whole heart into any task, however hard. Once they are said to have refused to accept the pay due to them lest it should hamper them on the way. They said they knew they would find the provisions supplied amply sufficient, and took a long and fatiguing march at high speed. Embarked on the Rhone in the flat river-boats they chafed at their slow progress, and even in the swiftest current declared they were wasting time.

When Constantine invaded Italy his guards besought him with tears not to imperil his royal person by pressing always to the front. Thus, however, he persisted in leading his army, and they went from victory to victory. He invaded Italy, besieged Turin, took the city and marched on to Milan, where he was received with admiring welcome. Verona made a stand, but was soon overcome, and so many prisoners were taken that the soldiers of

Constantine had to make fetters out of the weapons of their captives. Soon he was marching towards Rome itself, the very heart of the Empire ; and a legend grew up about a wonderful vision which he had, and was by it encouraged to persevere.

As he rested in his pavilion with the ranks of his army encamped around, a strange glow in the clear night sky caught his attention. Watching it he saw gradually, through a bright mist, a kind of sword-hilt appear, which became clearer and larger till a Cross hung in the sky, round which was a starry inscription with the words, "*In hoc signo vinces.*"

Nearing Rome he fought a great battle at the Milvian Bridge, when many of the enemy's troops were drowned through the breaking of the Pontoon of Boats. The painter Raphael commemorated the Vision and the victory twelve centuries later in two of his great pictures.

On entering the city Constantine punished severely the family of the dead Cæsar Maxentius, but treated all other foes with generosity. To celebrate the triumph the Senate decreed a public festival and the building of a Triumphal Arch with the words : "To the Liberator of the City," and "To the Founder of our Repose," on either side.

The great Emperor Diocletian, in whose reign the father of Constantine won his fame as a general, had been a cruel persecutor of the Christians. But after his abdication his successors showed less hostility, and Constantine had never shown cruelty towards them in his own dominions. Now, however, after the marvellous Vision and his conquest at Rome, he determined, not merely to refrain from persecution but to befriend the Christians. In an edict which he published from Milan he declared that all subjects in the Empire were to have "perfect

freedom to practise the religion which each has thought best for himself."

Soon after this his brother-in-law, Licinius Augustus, won a great victory at Byzantium, and he and Constantine were joint-governors alone of the great Roman Empire. Soon they quarrelled, and, in the war which followed, Constantine proved the Victor, so that he reigned alone, with his sons as governors of provinces. Some years later he visited Rome to celebrate his accession, and took the opportunity to show that he no longer considered Christianity one of many religions to be tolerated, but a faith which had a special claim upon him. One of the features of the celebration was a grand procession known as the "Ride of the Knights," in which the nobles went to the temple of Jupiter and offered incense. The Emperor refused to be present or to witness any of the ceremony, and thus greatly offended most of the Roman people. His aged mother, Helena, was becoming a Christian, but his own sons, like his half-brothers and sisters, elung to the Pagan beliefs. This, and the discontent of the Romans, caused Constantine to fear treachery from his son Crispus, whom he banished; and led to his forsaking Rome as a residencee.

A story is told of how the Emperor, lying ill one day, had a vision in which an angel charged him to recall from exile the chief Bishop of the Christian Church, Pope Sylvester, and to be baptised by him. This he did, and in gratitude for his recovery, he is said to have bestowed upon Sylvester and his successors complete authority over Rome. This is known as the "Donation of Constantine," and this it is which is referred to in the lines at the head of this chapter. At the same time he began to order the building of Christian churches in many of the cities of his Empire; and his mother, Helena



Augusta, set off on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. As was usual in those ancient times, this was inspired by a vision, in which the Empress was shown how to find the exact site of the Holy Sepulchre.

She made the journey, reached Jerusalem, and found the sacred Tomb and the Cross of Christ. In it were two nails which she sent, most carefully guarded, to her son. Constantine had one of them set in amongst the jewels of his crown, and the other on the bridle of his war-horse.

With his conversion to Christianity the Emperor determined to choose a new city for the seat of his Empire. After some indecision he chose Byzantium, on the Bosphorus, where only the narrow strait divides Europe from Asia. Like Jerusalem of old, it might well be said of Byzantium that it was "beautiful for situation," and Constantine set about restoring it on a splendid scale. We read that he himself marked out the new boundaries, which were to be of far greater extent than the ancient ones; and that as he made an enormous circuit his nobles ventured to point out how large the city would be. The Emperor replied, "I shall still advance until He, the invisible guide who marches before me, thinks it right to stop." Later, in his edicts, he always referred to the city he had built, and called after himself, as founded by the command of God.

Never was so great a work carried on so quickly. Within four years the walls were nearly complete; splendid churches, palaces and public buildings with towers and domes stood out against the blue sky. Forests were stripped, quarries were rifled, all the workshops of Imperial Rome were thronged with busy labourers; and highways and waterways saw a succession of caravans and vessels bearing materials for the new and glorious city. There might have been applied

to it the rest of the Eastern poet's description of Jerusalem, for Constantine's enthusiasm was making it "the joy of the whole earth."

There are still preserved some of the links of the massive chain which hung in the waves along the Golden Horn, so that no hostile ship could enter the harbour. In the very centre of the city was the Imperial Palace, built round a great enclosure and full of statuary brought from Egypt and Greece. On one side was the famous Church of S. Sophia, the Wisdom of God; on another the Senate-House of the Emperor; on a third the Hippodrome, and on the fourth the Forum. Within the Senate-House enclosure stood a marble column, from which all distances were measured; on its summit was a sculpture, showing the Emperor and his mother, standing on either side of a massive cross.

Opposite this was the tall column of Constantine, built of porphyry, mounted upon a deep marble base. Tradition said that in the hollow of the base were placed some most precious relics; the alabaster box from which Mary Magdalene anointed the feet of Christ; the crosses of the Two Thieves crucified with Him; and the sacred buckler which Numa, the Second King of Rome, proclaimed to have fallen from heaven. An inscription on the base of the column ran, "O Christ, Ruler and Master of the World, to Thee have I now consecrated this obedient city and this sceptre and the power of Rome. Guard and deliver it from every harm."

Upon the column stood a colossal statue of Apollo, brought from Athens, with the head of Constantine replacing the original. The globe borne in the left hand of the figure had a cross upreared from it, and the sometime Pagan deity represented in future the First Christian Emperor, "Constantine shining like the Sun," as the

title said. Once a year during the next seven centuries a religious service was held in the square around the column; and so sacred and impressive was it felt to be that no one passed it without reverently pausing, while every horseman dismounted and went by on foot. At the end of the fifth century the globe was thrown down by an earthquake, and five hundred years later the statue itself fell.

Besides all the fine buildings erected there were accomplished some wonderful engineering works for supplying the city with water. Great aqueducts and reservoirs were made, the most famous being that known as the Cistern of the Thousand and One Columns; and there may still be seen some of the names of the generous citizens who gave donations for the carrying out of the costly task.

The chief Bishop at Constantinople was known as the "Patriarch," the Greek equivalent of the Latin "Papa," and his Cathedral Church was dedicated to S. Irene, the Peace of God, and was as magnificent a building as that of S. Sophia. In a third famous Church, that of the Holy Apostles, in after years lay buried the Emperors and Popes of the East, until during the turbulent times of the Crusades the tombs were pillaged and destroyed.

Some of the most remarkable decorations of the city and its wide spaces were the great obelisks brought from Egypt and Greece. We remember that on the Thames Embankment there stands the tall pillar known as "Cleopatra's Needle," and that the great Queen had it brought from an ancient ruined city to form a pillar in the portico of her temple. One which Constantine had erected in Constantinople belonged to the same period as that which is now in London, the capital of the British Empire. Another wonderful column was brought from Delphi, the town of the famous temple of

Apollo where the Oracle was heard. It bore around it the entwined serpents which were the symbols of wisdom, and were sacred to Apollo.

During the reign of Constantine there were held Two of the Great Councils of the Church ; that of Arles in 313, and that of Nicæa in 325. The Emperor presided over the deliberations ; and when the Church in Africa was disturbed with quarrels, he did his best to bring about peace. He ruled his Empire with firmness, but, like all sovereigns who have absolute power, he was accustomed to follow his own will more closely than the spirit of the laws he administered. Thus, we read that in deciding cases brought before him, he would present the loser with a sum of money equal to that gained by the successful party, in order that both should leave his presence equally satisfied with his decision.

He was fond of magnificence in dress and surroundings ; and his illustrious successor, Julian, wrote bitterly upon his extravagance and vanity. Apart from his displeasure with his eldest son, Crispus, in Rome, and the cruel punishment he inflicted upon him, he had been devotedly attached to his family. When he was growing weary of sovereignty he arranged to divide his Empire amongst his three sons. They were gifted lads, and had been well trained and carefully educated ; and their indulgent father believed them to be able to follow in his steps. To the eldest, Constantine, he gave his own first dominions, Gaul, Spain and Britain ; to the second, Constantius, the provinces of Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt ; and to Constans, the youngest, Italy, Illyria and Africa. To his daughter, Constantina, he gave as dowry, Pontus, Cappadocia and Armenia ; and her husband received the new title of "Nobillissimus."

When this arrangement was complete Constantine



celebrated his Tri-cennalia, and the beautiful Church built on the site of the Holy Sepulchre was dedicated with elaborate ceremonies and great dignity.

Until now, although the Emperor had supported the Christian faith, and bestowed much of his wealth upon the Christian Church, he had not been baptised. Falling ill early in the year 337, he felt that death was near, and asked to be admitted a member of the Church. He had deferred the rite in the hope of being baptised in the river Jordan, but that was not to be. Removing his purple robes he clad himself in the white of the catechumens, and after the baptism lay down upon a white bed and sought to prepare for death. "Now I know in very truth that I am blessed; now I know that I am a partaker of divine light," he declared; and when his military leaders came to bid him farewell, he assured them that he was glad to die, and desired to be with God.

Grand funeral ceremonies were observed for many days, as subject-rulers from all parts of his mighty Empire came to the lying-in-state, and passed by the sarcophagus of gold in which the dead Emperor lay. Rome begged that his remains might be brought to the home of the Emperors, but Constantine had chosen the Church of the Apostles in his own city as his last resting-place, and thither he was borne. The coins commemorating his death bore on one side the head of the Emperor veiled, and, on the other, his seated figure in a chariot ascending to heaven.

Dante shows us this monarch in the sixth heaven, the planet Jupiter. The souls of righteous sovereigns and just rulers form a constellation in the figure of an Eagle; the eye of the bird is seen to be the souls of Kings; David in the centre, and, in the circle round it, Constantine with the Jewish sovereign Hezekiah, the renowned Roman Emperor Trajan, and other monarchs.



## XVI

### Severinus Boëthius

475-524

“The saintly soul, that shows  
The world’s deceitfulness to all who hear him,  
Is with the sight of all the Good that is  
Blest there . . .”

*Paradiso x.*

SEVERINUS BOËTHIUS was born of a noble Roman house at a time when the seat of the Empire was at Constantinople. Italy, once the home of the masters of the world, was under the rule of the German invaders whom the Romans called “Barbarians.” When Boëthius was a boy of fourteen, the Emperor Zeno sent Theodoric, the leader of the East-Goths, to invade Italy, and drive out their rivals, the West-Goths. Theodoric was successful, and at once set himself to make Italy a self-governed and flourishing country. Unlike most conquerors he made no attempt to assert his personal power over the Roman people. He claimed the title “King of the Goths” only, and permitted freedom of religion to all the people over whom he ruled so long as they kept the peace.

At the yearly election of consuls (no longer chosen by the people) the Emperor named one and King Theodoric the other. Theodoric required his subjects, whether Goth or Roman or Jew, to respect each other’s rights,

and to obey laws framed for the good of all. By his wise and just government Italy became powerful and prosperous. He made Verona the seat of his kingdom, and there encouraged and protected scholars, and brought back much of the dignity and greatness of the past.

Of all the Italian gentlemen whom Theodoric delighted to honour the two foremost were Symmachus, a noted orator and aristocrat, and the gifted Severinus Boëthius. More than once, each of them was named Senator by the King, and no Roman more highly appreciated their learning and judgment. The parents of Boëthius had died whilst he was still young ; and he lived much in the house of Symmachus, who had a daughter of about the same age. The young man was devoted to study and, because so much of the Roman literature had perished in the troubled years of the invaders, he journeyed to Athens that he might there read the works of Plato and Aristotle and the mathematicians.

On his return he translated into Latin many of the works of the old Greek writers, amongst them the wonderful treatise on Arithmetic of Nicomachus. This work was then five centuries old, and was based upon the still older one by Pythagoras, who lived before Euclid. Boëthius not only translated this Arithmetic, but also enlarged it with some discoveries of his own, and a collection of problems. We still gratefully use the old classification of "odd" and "even" numbers ; but we have nearly lost sight of a further difference upon which Boëthius dwelt in his book.

He points out that odd numbers may be seen to be *oddly-odd* or *evenly-odd* ; thus 3, 7, 11, etc., are *oddly-odd*, because they are made up of (an *odd* number-of-times 2) + 1 ; while 5, 9, 13, etc., are *evenly-odd* because they are made up of (an *even* number-of-times 2) + 1.

So the even numbers are either *evenly-even* or *oddly-even* ; *evenly-even* if, like 4, 8, 12, they are made up of *even* factors ; and *oddly-even* if, like 2, 6, 10, they each have an *odd* and an *even* factor.

Boëthius also wrote a book on Geometry, containing some of the propositions from Euclid, Books I. and III., and some examples in what we call practical mensuration ; and he explained the making of the two scientific time-measurers of antiquity, the sun-dial and the water-clock.

Some time after his return from Athens he married the beautiful daughter of his friend Symmachus ; and while living in a palace as a patrician and a man of wealth, attended the Senate and took his share in the work of government, sparing himself none of its irksome duties, and everywhere supporting Theodoric's ideas of justice and tolerance for all Roman subjects. Presently he was given one of the high positions about the Court at Verona ; and as " Master of the Offices " had the control of all matters in which the King consulted his ministers.

Soon, however, some action of his own was misrepresented to Theodoric, and the King charged him with plotting against him. Boëthius indignantly denied the accusation, but would not condescend to plead or argue, and the King had him imprisoned. It reminds us rather of the English King Henry VIII. and his treatment of Sir Thomas More ; for Theodoric, as he grew old, feared treachery, and suspected his most faithful servants of evil designs. So the noble senator was sent to the fortress of Pavia, and kept in a dungeon, heavily loaded with fetters. There, instead of fretting or nursing revengeful thoughts, he set himself to record all the joy and strength that had come to him through his faithful pursuit of truth and wisdom. He entitled his book,

“The Consolation of Philosophy,” and after the fashion of the time, tells his story in the form of a Vision.

As he lay weeping for his past happiness there appeared to him the figure of a beautiful woman, tall and majestic, and with eyes of glowing tenderness. She was clad in flowing robes of woven stuff with broad embroidery upon the hem, the pattern of which formed certain Greek characters. Boëthius presently recognised them as P and T, and understood that the one signified the Active life of good deeds, and the other the Contemplative life of devout thought.

Gazing upon him with pity and wonder she drew near, while he lay abashed and sorry ; and, murmuring words of tender reproof for his loss of heart, showed him that he had forgotten the way to find comfort, and was wasting his strength in lamentation. She recalled his studies in the great truths of astronomy and philosophy, his knowledge of the causes of things, and grieved to see him thus cast down though loaded with chains in a dungeon. She dried his eyes, which were dimmed with a “cloud of mortal things” and full of tears, and presently he took heart to look straight at his mysterious visitor. Then he recognised his “divine mistress, Philosophy.” He told her why he was so downcast and miserable ; wrongfully accused, banished from his home, imprisoned and in chains ; and she reminded him that many men had suffered likewise, and that no king could send his spirit into exile, but only his body. By degrees he became comforted and enlightened, and the whole of the rest of the book is a collection of beautiful thoughts and reflections that bear out the fine spirit of the cavalier lyric of twelve centuries later :—

“Stone walls do not a prison make ;  
Nor iron bars a cage,



Minds innocent and quiet take  
That for an hermitage."

The book consists of alternate prose and verse and is, in part, in the form of a Dialogue between Boëthius and his heavenly visitant. We find in it a very favourite idea of all old-time writers ; that of some distant early age when men lived simply and happily.

" Blissful was the first age of men !

They were content with the food which the trees and plants gave ;  
They satisfied their hunger with the fruits of the Earth ;  
They made no strong drink ;  
They wore no rich garments ;  
But slept wholesomely upon the green grass  
And drank of the running waters.

None cut the high seas with oars or with ships ;  
None sought to carry for money merchandise into far lands ;  
Then the harsh clarions of war were still ;  
Nor had bloodshed by eager hate dyed their armour.

I would that our times should turn again to the old manners !"

Boëthius shows us that the purpose of the heavenly lady is to lift his heart above the care of earthly things. So she inspires him with the thought of the peace and lastingness of the things which are beyond the disturbance of man, and the description reminds us of the beautiful one in the Book of Job.

" If thou wilt judge in truth the ways of the Most High,  
Look thou and behold the heights of the Sovereign heaven :  
There by the rightful order of things the stars maintain their ancient  
peace,  
The sun glowing with ruddy fire disturbeth not the cold circle of the  
moon,  
Nor doth the star, the Bear, which taketh his course about the  
sovereign heights of heaven,  
Desire to plunge his flames into the Western Sea.  
Likewise Hesperus abideth and shines in the late night,



While Lucifer ariseth and showeth the early day :  
 Thus doth Love control the everlasting courses of the stars,  
 And discord and war are far removed from the high heavens."

Many striking details in the history of man and of the world are introduced, so that Boëthius may feel his mind strengthened and refreshed to grasp the arguments which "Philosophy" brings to comfort him. In his misery he had been inclined to blame Fortune for his exile and imprisonment; so his visitant reminds him that Fortune, or Chance, is not supreme, but that a Divine power rules over all. She teaches him by means of a fable or parable.

"The rivers Tigris and Euphrates spring from one source,  
 From one source they arise in the crags of the high rocks;  
 But soon these great streams conjoin their waters and separate.  
 Then float upon them by divers ways the mighty ships,  
 And the great rafts, and the stakes and trees uprooted in the flood;  
 And whither they drift is determined not by the mighty stream;  
 But by the downward bend of the Earth doth the water glide.  
 So also doth Fortune submit to a bridle that holds her,  
 And follows the course ordained, as do the mighty rivers."

At another time a cheering thought is gathered from Natural History.

"The beasts of the Earth are many and of divers kinds :  
 Some have their bodies stretched and creep in the dust,  
 Drawing after them a furrow as they pass, as adders and snakes;  
 Others there are with lightly fleeting wings that lift them through  
 the air spaces;  
 Others there are that dig their homes in the woods and fields,  
 But all alike have their faces toward the Earth;  
 Man, and man alone, lifteth erectly his high head  
 And standeth with an upright body regarding the Earth beneath him.  
 Wherefore, O man, if at any time thou thinkest to despair,  
 This thought admonishes thee : Thou lookest to heaven :  
 Thou upliftest thy forehead that thou shouldst bear a high courage :  
 Thou shouldest not then cast low thy thought underfoot,  
 Since that thy body is so high upraised."

Well might the noble prisoner have needed some high, brave thoughts to console him as he lay for months in a dungeon of the Tower of Pavia. Resolutely he kept himself from fretting and anxiety during the long time of suspense, and devoted his lonely hours to thinking out and compiling the "Consolation of Philosophy." The work became one of the most famous and most treasured of all the writings of the Middle Ages. Our own King Alfred the Great loved it, and translated it into Anglo-Saxon. Five centuries later the Scholar-Poet Chaucer translated it into the English of his day, and many of the religious and philosophical books of later times were based upon it.

At length the Emperor, fearing that even in prison Boëthius was working against him secretly, gave orders that he should be executed. Those were cruel times, so that perhaps it is not to be wondered at that this peaceful, high-souled scholar was condemned to die a painful death. A strong cord was tied around his head, and drawn tight, until he suffered terrible agony, and he was then beaten to death with heavy clubs. His poor mutilated body was buried in a cloister of the Church of San Pietro di Ceildauro (the gilded ceiling) at Pavia; but three and half centuries later his coffin was removed to a splendid tomb by the Emperor Otho III.

Dante shows us the soul of this martyred thinker in the glowing circle which surrounded himself and Beatrice, in the heaven of the sun. His is one of Twelve spirits which move in majestic order round them, uttering music which "may not be conceived on earth."

## XVII

### The Emperor Justinian

483-565

“I turn’d  
Toward the lustre. . . . Forthwith, brighter far  
Than erst, it wax’d : and as himself the sun  
Hides through excess of light, when his warm gaze  
Hath on the mantle of thick vapours prey’d,  
Within its proper ray the saintly shape  
Was, through increase of gladness, thus concealed ;  
And, shrouded so in splendour, answer’d me,  
E’en as the tenor of my song declares . . .

‘Cæsar I was ;  
And am Justinian : destined by the will  
Of that prime love whose influence I feel,  
From vain excess to clear the encumber’d laws.’”

*Paradiso vi.*

THE Emperor Justinian was born in the year 483, in a mountain village of Bulgaria, and named after his uncle, Justin, who in his youth had left his rustic home to find his fortune, and had won fame as a soldier. When Justinian was about thirteen years of age, his uncle adopted him and had him educated at Constantinople. On the death of the Emperor Anastatius, the many plots about the succession ended in the most brilliant soldier of the time being appointed ; and thus the successful general became the Emperor Justin I.

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The young Justinian was soon made Master-General of the Eastern armies, and assisted his uncle in his Imperial duties. The hard life which Justin had led, and his increasing age, unfitted him for the exhausting demands of his position, and the Senate and the Imperial Guards asked him to associate his nephew with himself in the Government. For this he was unwilling, as it meant sharing a position which he had but just attained ; but his growing weakness and a painful disease presently compelled him to depute his power, and after a reign of only nine years he died.

Justinian reigned for nearly forty years ; and his successes in war, his good government and wise policy in Church and State, and above all his reform of Roman law, won for him the admiration and esteem of all later ages. His Empire contained sixty-four provinces and nine hundred and thirty-five cities, in Europe, Asia and Africa ; the Imperial galleys were on every coast, and the merchant fleet on every sea. He rebuilt the Church of S. Sophia at Constantinople, and at the great festival which celebrated its completion, the Emperor exclaimed, "Glory be to God who hath thought me worthy to accomplish so great a work ; I have vanquished thee, O Solomon !" He encouraged the immigration of Persian silk-workers and Babylonian artists in metal ; protected the caravan roads, and built a line of forts along the Danube to guard his territory from the invasions of the Barbarians. His native village, Tauresium, became a capital and the seat of a Dacian Archbishopric, and was called *Justiniana Prima*. A great wall stretched from the Propontis to the Euxine Sea, and another guarded the shepherd-Goths in Crimea from the Avars. He fortified the port of Trebizonde ; drained it and built aqueducts, and presented it with a Christian Church.

In later centuries, when the city had become the seat of a Greek Empire, its inhabitants proudly claimed Justinian the Emperor as the founder of its greatness.

Along those rivers Euphrates and Tigris, so famous in the ancient world, stretched the Roman forts; and Armenia and Mesopotamia were both under his sway. By a league with the Shah of Persia, the Emperor also helped to maintain the great wall which protected their dominions from the inroads of the Scythians, or Tartars.

In the West Justinian subdued the revolt in Africa by a great victory won at Carthage, which his fleet and army reached after a three months' voyage from Constantinople. From Carthage they conquered Sardinia and Corsica, and made firm their footing in Italy, seizing Sicily, and easily landing troops at Rhegium whence they marched to Naples. This town was largely Greek; it had been the favourite residence of Virgil, and had become as it were a little Athens. The Roman general, Belisarius, one of the most famous of leaders, proposed honourable terms which the Greeks would have accepted; but the Goths resisted and it was besieged. By a clever strategy the Roman armies got into the town by night, and Belisarius showed his greatness by forbidding slaughter or ill-treatment of fellow Christians, but permitted his troops to plunder public buildings. Everywhere many of the Italian Goths deserted their allegiance to the Gothic King at Rome, and Belisarius marched upon, and entered this city in triumph. Soon, however, the Goths collected forces and began a siege, one of the most exciting and wonderful in the records of war. The great general fortified the city and gave each gate into the charge of a responsible officer with the order *to guard it and hold it*. A great trench was dug round the fortifications: upon the walls were planted



archers and deadly engines : a chain was drawn across the Tiber : and every strong building within the city, including Hadrian's Mausoleum, was turned into a citadel.

The splendid statues and sculptures which ornamented this tower were torn down and flung upon the besiegers : the townspeople watched while the troops slept, and relieved them at their labours of trenching and mining, following enthusiastically, with what weapons they could find, when the army made a sally from the town. Belisarius so skilfully and successfully planned and planted guards, that the great highways into the city, the " Latin Way," " the Appian Way," and the " Ostian Way," could be used for the supply of corn to the beleaguered inhabitants. Most thrilling are the accounts of how this great general not only circumvented the besiegers, but also kept control of the besieged : restrained the unwise ardour and the conceit of the brave, and silenced the murmurs of the waverers and the disloyal. His devices for safety against treachery and spies were ingenious and innumerable : fresh stations ; new patrols ; interlocked watchwords ; flashing of lights ; sounding of signals ; all kinds of mysterious signs and movements were woven into a great code of watchfulness. Even dogs were trained to go about the ramparts and the trenches carrying communications.

Only just in time was discovered an attempt of the Pope to communicate from the Lateran with the Gothic King. We have a striking picture of the interview between the stern general and the pontiff ; admitted through the guarded, public chambers of the Pincian Palace, Pope Sylverinus stood before Belisarius to be questioned in privacy. Then he laid off, one by one, his pontifical vestments, and was sent, clad as a poor monk, to a remote Eastern city into perpetual exile.

The Emperor Justinian commanded the clergy of Rome to elect a new Bishop, and urged Belisarius to complete the conquest of Italy without delay. There has been preserved the letter of the general sent in reply : “ Belisarius to the most mighty Justinian, Imperator Augustus. According to your commands we have entered the dominions of the Goths, and reduced to your obedience Sicily, Campania, and the city of Rome. Hitherto we have successfully fought against the multitude of the Barbarians, but their numbers may finally prevail. Victory is the gift of Providence, but the reputation of kings and generals depends on the success or failure of their designs. Permit me to speak with freedom ; if you wish that we should live, send us subsistence ; if you desire that we should conquer, send us arms, horses, and men. For myself, my life is consecrated to your service ; it is yours to reflect whether my death in this situation will contribute to the glory and prosperity of your reign.”

In response to this appeal Justinian sent a small army of Huns and Sclavonians ; and these, with the contingents raised in Campania, gave fresh vigour to the besieged. The lady Antonina, wife of Belisarius, gave great help, going forth herself at the head of a troop and collecting volunteers. She was in her husband’s councils, and in all ways was another “ good right hand ” to him. The story goes that she sat beside her husband during the painful interview with the treacherous Pope ; and that the grave, short questions of the general were supplemented by more searching and imperious ones from her.

The Emperor, when first planning to subdue Italy, had invited the help of the Franks ; but they had responded ill, as the Goths also approached them and offered bribes

for their support. So that there were Franks and Goths to face ; and had it not been that disease struck down, not only the army, but also the populations of many towns, Belisarius could hardly have conquered. Ravenna was the last place to make a stand. There the Goths offered Belisarius himself nominal sovereignty and the title of King of Italy, and one less noble and single-minded would have yielded to the temptation. After Ravenna fell, the Goths of Pavia and Verona approached him in the same way ; but always he refused any oath of allegiance except to his distant and exacting master, Justinian. In spite of his loyalty the Emperor doubted him, and recalled him on the grounds of needing his help in the East. On his arrival in Constantinople, the honour and delight with which he was received, the plaudits and acclamations, suggest that Justinian may have felt something of the unworthy resentment of the Hebrew King Saul, when his capital resounded with songs in praise of David.

Belisarius undertook the needed Eastern campaign, and once again returned to Constantinople, having accomplished a mighty task, to be received coldly by the Emperor, and presently to be heavily fined for mismanagement of troops and trophies. Then he was sent once more to Italy, to enforce the Imperial power upon the Goths who had despised and revolted against the eleven generals left by Belisarius. One ruled in each principal city ; as at Rome, Verona, Ravenna, Florence, Perugia, etc. ; but the Gothic national feeling was strong enough to lead them to welcome an enterprising chief Totila, and to unite again to overthrow the Emperor's power. Under a great general, Narses, the Goths were at length subdued, their king slain in battle, and the Emperor's representative seated at Ravenna,

as Exarch. Of these, Narses was the first. When Belisarius presented himself at Constantinople the Emperor again received him coldly, and hardly cared to give him an audience. Soon, an accusation was brought against him by some officers of the Palace, that he was concerned in a plot against Justinian, and he was confined as a prisoner to his own palace fortress. When he was released, after a few months' detention, he had no longer spirit or resolution to face the world again, and he died shortly, worn out and broken-hearted. The Emperor confiscated his goods and the spoils of his victories, leaving only a modest portion for his widow, who, wearied of her strenuous and adventurous life, asked only to retire into a convent for rest and peace.

Throughout his reign, Justinian had caused and ordered wars, but he had not led in them. Thus he knew little of the far-reaching evils of war, and, justly enough, the glory of the successes belonged to his generals. Once the seat of the Empire, Constantinople itself was threatened by an invading army of Barbarians, and, but for the skill and prompt action of Belisarius, the city might have fallen. It had been much enlarged, and enriched with beautiful buildings, since the rebuilding of S. Sophia in the first years of the Emperor's reign. An earthquake had destroyed part of this, and it had been rebuilt even more magnificently. More than twenty great churches, decorated with marble and gold, were built, or rebuilt; and the palaces and gardens of the city were the wonder of the world. The population were devoted to the shows and public amusements which every capital provides, and the great races which celebrated special occasions were on an immense scale. Amongst the Greeks the chariot racing had been a series of contests between twos; but the Roman fashion per-



mitted thirty or forty to start at once, driven by hired charioteers who were the petted darlings of the spectators.

Justinian had married a beautiful Greek dancer, named Theodora, and made her Empress, and associated her with himself in all his public acts. She was a woman of great strength of character, absolutely fearless, and as imperious as any one born in the purple. Early in his reign, when some adherents of another claimant were plotting against him, the Emperor was about to flee from his palace, but Theodora indignantly appealed to his sense of honour and persuaded him to remain. "If flight were the only means of safety," said she, "I should disdain to fly. Death is the condition of our birth, but they who have reigned should never survive the loss of dignity and dominion. . . . I hold to the maxim of antiquity, that the throne is a glorious sepulchre."

The Emperor was an able scholar, unlike his uncle and predecessor, Justin, who could neither read nor sign his own name; and he was a tireless worker. After toiling for hours by day with his ministers and captains, he would sleep for a few hours, and then pursue his great task of revising the whole of the Roman laws. He desired to understand the arts, science and literature; and clad as a workman supervised the actual building of palaces and churches in order that he might see that the true laws of architecture were observed. He endeavoured to reconcile the doctrines of the Church so that Arians and Catholics might sink their differences and live in peace, and he proclaimed himself the patron of poetry and music.

In his ambition to be the most powerful Christian ruler, he carried on, and even provoked, wars; and to do so had to tax his subjects heavily, and cramp the trade



and industry of his realm. So that great poverty and much suffering went on together with distant conquests, and there was much discontent with his government. As is usually the case with monarchs who are absolute, the well-being of even the great depended too much upon his personal caprice. A favourite servant or soldier or official would be profusely loaded with gifts and honours, whilst others were so meanly supplied that they could hardly fill their posts. His armies were alternately over-paid and not paid at all : he absorbed all the public tribute almost before it was due ; never (as generous despots often do) excusing a part to signalise special occasions : the public revenue was ostentatiously "farmed out," and honours and offices permitted to be sold for gain.

In order to concentrate all learning and political power in the Eastern capital, Justinian closed the famous Academies of Athens and abolished the Roman consulships. Perhaps the study of philosophical statesmanship was dangerous to the supremacy of an Emperor ; possibly the ready speech of debaters and arguers in the schools boded ill for the silent acceptance of imperial decrees. The consuls, too, recalled a day when the people chose their magistrates ; and though Theodoric had been proud to be called "consul," Justinian preferred to have none even appear to share his authority.

The arrogance of Justinian was equalled, and perhaps chastened, in his alliance with the great and ancient Kingdom of Persia. The monarch of that realm declared that he, the successor of Cyrus, was "as the Sun in his unapproachable majesty," and that he graciously permitted his younger brother, Justinian, "to reign over the West with the paler and reflected splendour of the moon." When his ambassador visited Constantinople

he went in the height of Eastern state, with guards and horsemen and a train of camels, and stayed for nearly a year, the Emperor's guest. In his latter years Justinian was more ready to listen to counsels of peace, especially in regard to great Oriental powers, but he was resolute, to the end of his reign, in trying to subdue any alien people in Europe. Yet the greatness of his victories, and the extent of his Empire, and the magnificence of his buildings, all are as nothing compared with his great legacy of the ordered Roman Law. In the ten centuries which had passed since the foundation of Rome, the various laws and theories of government had become hopelessly confused. Only a lawyer could hope to understand and justify any. The great divisions of Natural law, National law, and Civil law had alike passed under the personal will of the sovereign; whilst the studies and opinions delivered at various times on legal matters were so many that no scholar could hope to master and reconcile them.

Justinian arranged and restated all the main theories, and swept away the confusing differences; where laws, made at different times, contradicted each other by over-severity or too great leniency, he revised and modified them, following a clear and strong principle of justice. Thus his name has been handed down as the type of the just Legislator, and the laws which he framed were the foundation of those of modern Europe.

The Three great books in which they were enrolled were known as the Code, the Pandects, and the Institutes; they were addressed to the Senate and the provinces as the Eternal oracles of the Emperor, who claimed to have been directly inspired by God to attempt and to carry out the great task. He declared that he had but arranged, copied and quoted, and that none of the

work was of his original composition ; and to guard against alterations or forgery he forbade the writing of commentaries upon the text. As the years passed it became necessary to revise the work again ; and this time the Emperor did not hesitate to alter and rescind, as well as to add fresh laws.

An army of notaries and copyists were kept employed in making transcripts of these statutes for the use and guidance of the various states of Justinian's vast empire ; where they were proclaimed on Sundays after Divine Service, at the church doors.

Eight months after the death of his gallant and loyal general, Belisarius, the Emperor Justinian died, at the great age of eighty-three years. His beloved wife was dead ; he had no son, and his only daughter died young ; but he had nephews and grand-nephews, and to the best-loved of these the Emperor bequeathed his realm.

Dante revered the memory of the great Roman sovereign, and shows us his spirit in the Heaven of Mercury. The shining being graciously explains to Dante the august nature of the Roman Empire as he recounts the steps of its progress down to his own day. In that planet with his are the spirits of the heroes who served the Empire, but whose service was not entirely self-sacrificing. Now they stand purged of all desire for glory, desiring only the fulfilment of the purpose of Divine Love.

“ It is part of our delight to measure  
Our wages with the merit ; and admire  
The close proportion. Hence doth heavenly justice  
Temper so evenly affection in us,  
It ne'er can warp to any wrongfulness.  
Of diverse voices is sweet music made :  
So in our life the different degrees  
Render sweet harmony among those wheels.”

# Charlemagne and Roland

“Blessed spirits abide,  
That were below, ere they arrived in heaven,  
So mighty in renown, as every muse  
Might grace her triumph with them. . . .  
Along the cross I saw  
A splendour gliding . . .  
For Charlemagne  
And for the peer Orlando. . . .”

IT is no wonder that Dante, in recording the marvels of the Fifth Heaven, the Heaven of Mars, included amongst the "blessed spirits, so mighty in renown," that of the great Emperor. Sober history and glowing fable unite in proclaiming the personality and the work of Charlemagne as without equals. His father, Pippin, King of the Franks, had defeated the Lombards and prevented their march to Rome, so that the Pope gratefully accorded him the title of Patrician. Charles carried his father's conquests still further, and soon bore the title, "King of the Franks and the Lombards, and Patrician of Rome"; thus declaring the subdual of the Lombard kingdom and its merging into his own dominions. Then the Eastern Emperor, Constantine VI., died, leaving no recognised heir, and the lofty idea of

combining the spiritual power under a Pope with the temporal power under an Emperor, at Rome itself, took form.

Not only was Charles supreme over the greater part of Europe, but also he received tribute from kingdoms and peoples beyond, and had friendly alliance with the great Caliph Haroun al Raschid, who ruled at Baghdad. This sovereign, whose name is known wherever the Tales of the Thousand and One Nights are known, was a powerful and enlightened ruler. In his time learning flourished, and Greek and Hindu scholars were always welcomed at his court. Through the encouragement given by him and his predecessor, the science of numbers, as taught by the old Greeks and the Hindus, was studied ; and the two mysterious branches of it, Algor-ithm and Al-jebhra, were introduced into Europe. Cordova, in Spain, was still the seat of the Moorish, or Arabian, kingdom in Europe, and was one of the last citadels to yield to the armies of Charles. This great warrior-king fought, not from love of fighting merely, like many of the heroes of old, but because he was resolved to have a Christian Empire ; and thus the " heathen " or infidels must be expelled or converted.

During the long and barbarous wars which had gone on in Europe for the past three centuries, learning and civilisation had almost disappeared. But Charles himself spoke Latin and read Latin literature, knew Greek and revered the Greek Christian poets. He desired peace throughout Christendom so that knowledge might grow. He founded schools in the German towns Aachen and Hildesheim and Fulda, and required the Abbots of monasteries and Priors of cathedrals to provide shelter and teaching for all who would learn. His favourite book was S. Augustine's " City of God," which he would have read to him at his private meals.



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Late in the year 800, Charlemagne marched, with a splendid retinue and many men-at-arms, through his dominions to Rome to attend the Christmas services at S. Peter's. The great festival was taken as the opportunity for proclaiming him temporal sovereign of Christendom; and according to the account written by the Pope's secretary and librarian, this most impressive ceremony took place on Christmas Day. "All men being gathered together in the basilica of the blessed Peter the Apostle, then did the gracious and venerable pontiff, with his own hands, crown the King with a very precious crown. Then all the faithful people of Rome did cry with one accord, with one voice, 'To Charles, the most pious Augustus, crowned of God, great and peace-giving Emperor, be life and victory.'" Thus Charles became acknowledged "Lord of the World," and set himself anew to govern justly the men and states over whom he was supreme.

We read that he called a great council at Aachen, and revised the laws of his many subject-countries, seeking to harmonise and correct them.

Then the time came when he needed a tutor for his young sons; and so grievously had learning decayed that nowhere in Europe might a devout scholar be found save only in the Western Isle of Britain, Ierne. There, in a few quiet monasteries, lived certain monks as devoted to study as the scholars of old-time, and for one of these the great Emperor sent. Alcuin had been a pupil of Bede the Venerable, in his Northumbrian monastery; and like him was a man of saintly life as well as of great abilities. As tutor to the young princes Alcuin had easy access to the great Emperor, and his counsels more than once served to bring his master's influence to bear for good on the troubled state of Saxon Britain. The

mighty Offa of Mercia and Egbert of Wessex were the most powerful of our kings during the reign of Charlemagne; and the Emperor made treaties with the one, and entertained the other at his court.

The little lads upon whom so much care was to be lavished were very different from their father. The youngest and most delicate, Louis, was the only one to outlive the Emperor. We are able to know something of the kind of education Alcuin tried to give the imperial princes; first the honoured Roman *trivium* of Grammar, Logic and Rhetoric; and then the more advanced *quadrivium*, Arithmetic, Music, Geometry and Astronomy. Alcuin's teacher Bede had been a notable mathematician, and had invented further aids to counting besides the ten fingers; and Alcuin had something of the same gift. Amongst the few books of the period which remained to later times was a collection of Arithmetical problems compiled by him for his pupils. Considering the few tools in the way of neat notation and lists of results such as the multiplication table, there must have been real difficulty in attacking even so simple a question as one which has appeared in generations of school-books since Alcuin's; "A dog, chasing a hare which has a start of one-hundred-and-fifty feet, jumps nine feet for every seven of the hare. In how many leaps will the dog overtake the hare?"

We may imagine the great, genial Emperor sympathising with the boys' dismay on being confronted with such unusual details of the hunting-field, and inviting them to a riding contest or a wrestling bout as an easier exercise. For physical prowess counted for much in education in those days; the gentleman must possess varied accomplishments, and be an ornament in court and camp, and excel in everything which he attempted.

## Charlemagne and Roland 211

The "clerkly" side was by no means the most important, unless the learner was intended for the Church ; but the Emperor recognised that without acquaintance with the gentler arts, and without any quieter pursuits, his subjects would desire to be always fighting.

Charlemagne, like many sovereigns burdened with state and power, sometimes chose to discard Imperial forms and ceremonies, and with his intimate nobles would adopt the name and assume the character each of some hero of the past. Charlemagne chose that of David, the famous king of Israel, whom, of all the illustrious men of old, he most admired.

The appearance and accomplishments of the Emperor were favourite subjects with the romancers and storytellers of the Middle Ages. Many wonderful legends grew up about his feats of strength, his courage and ingenuity, his knightly gentleness and grace. We read that he was of great height and strongly made, of commanding presence and of striking beauty. His thick brows and flashing eyes were very noticeable : " When he was angry it was a terror to look upon him," wrote Archbishop Turpin. The same chronicler records his immense strength. He would invite a knight, wearing armour and fully accoutred, to stand upon his hand on the ground and would then lift him shoulder high. He had no greedy love for the pleasures of the table, and drank wine mingled with water, but his big frame was served by an enormous appetite. His swordsmanship was amazing ; with one mighty blow of his sword, Joyeuse, he could cleave in two a mounted soldier from the helmet to the saddle and the steed as well.

In the ranks of his knights were several whose names have been handed down as those of great and formidable warriors or invincible helpers of the oppressed, or brave

and courteous gentlemen incapable of deceit or guile. Amongst these Paladins were men of all nations: German and Briton and Tuscan and Frank and Dane, united in the bonds of chivalry, like the knights of King Arthur. And like those of the British Round Table, one there was who was a traitor. Next in renown to the Emperor himself was Roland, or Orlando, the son of his eldest sister, whose valour and nobleness made him much beloved of his uncle. It seemed that while his own boys were children he lavished upon this young kinsman something of the affection of a father as well as the patronage of a superior, and we can fancy him continually desiring that his sons should grow up daring and valorous like their cousin. Count Roland had in the band one especial friend and companion, Oliver, Count of Gênes, and together they rode in many a fight. The names of these two Paladins have been handed down in jest and story as examples of knightly friends and loyal companions, but Shakespeare in his merry play *As You Like It*, gave the names to two brothers, one of whom is mean and jealous. Hence arose perhaps the proverb which seems to tell of strife rather than of friendship, "A Roland for an Oliver."

In Dante's day, Charlemagne and his warriors were still the ideal and wonder-working Christian soldiers, who had fought against and conquered all the "Paynim Chivalry." People seemed still to hear the clang of their arms and the ring of their shields; and the valiant deeds of Roland and the treachery by which he fell, to the great grief of Charlemagne, were the subjects of stirring romances.

When, after seven long years of war in Spain, the Emperor and his host at last took Cordova, the Moorish capital, he and his paladins encamped on a great green



space outside the city, and awaited the full submission of the heathen King Marsilius. But Marsilius had wily counsellors, who thought to deceive the Christian Emperor; so he sent an embassy of nine of his mighty peers, with their sons as hostages, to Charlemagne's pavilion, promising submission, and saying that he would march to Aachen after Charlemagne, and there be baptised on the Feast of S. Michael and do him homage in his Christian temple. The Emperor assembled his Counts and held consultation, for he never returned a hasty or unconsidered answer, and one advised one thing and one another. Count Roland recalled the many times that Marsilius had broken his word, and urged that no treaty should be made with him. Count Ganelon, who was at heart a traitor, recommended the sending of an ambassador and the fulfilment of a covenant.

This was at length agreed upon, and then arose friendly rivalry as to who should bear the Emperor's word to the heathen king. Count Oliver was adjudged too young, Count Roland too impetuous, so, in the end, Count Ganelon was sent. And on the way he meditated how to be avenged of the many slights he fancied that he had endured from his fellows and his royal master, and determined to induce King Marsilius to make a last attempt to win his freedom. Admitted to the audience he delivered his message and then gave his private advice; which was that Marsilius and his hosts should fall upon Charlemagne's army as they marched, unsuspecting, back to Aachen, and wreak a terrible vengeance. The heathen king made him swear upon the Koran and his own sword-handle that the Emperor's troops would by a certain day be gathered together on their homeward march so that he could attack them,



and then loaded him with gifts and entertained him with great honour.

Meanwhile in the Emperor's camp it had been arranged that Count Olger, the Dane, should lead the vanguard of the army, the Emperor march next, and the valiant Count Roland be with the rearguard and slowly follow after. Now the way through Spain to Germany was perilous and wild; through deep dark valleys with gloomy mountains on either side, and over narrow, dangerous passes with frowning crags and yawning precipices, and everywhere were many lurking-places where secret foes might hide. And the mighty Emperor was grave and ill-at-ease; for before starting he had dreamed an evil dream of a viper fastening upon his hand, and a leopard springing upon him; and, though a great hound sprang forward to save him, he knew not when he awoke that the beasts were overcome. Thus he feared treachery, and longed to know that all was well with Roland and his army, who were slowly to follow towards Aachen, leaving all Spain subdued and at peace.

Meanwhile Count Roland and his sworn friend Count Oliver were leading their army towards the mountain pass looking down upon the valley of Roncesvalles. Roland was mounted on his beloved steed Vegliantino ("the little vigilant one") and wore his trusty sword Durendal; and Oliver rode his fleet charger Ferrant d'Espagne ("Spanish traveller"), and carried his sword Haltclere. When they reached the top of the Pass, they saw that a vast Moorish army was gathered on the plain below; and they knew that Ganelon had betrayed their plans to the King Marsilius. Yet, would they not turn back, though the odds were great and the Frankish soldiers were sorely fatigued with the hard

march and the roughness of the way. Archbishop Turpin, who went with them, gave his blessing to the leaders and the troops, saying, "It is a right good thing to die for King and faith."

Then they marched on down the stony way to the valley, and the battle which ensued was fierce and long. After many hours, of the Generals there were but Roland and Oliver left alive, and thousands of their army were slain. Now Roland wore, slung on a baldrick, a horn won by him from the giant Jatmund, which had magical power, and a compact had been made between them that should Roland ever be in sore need he should sound his horn and Charlemagne would come to him from the ends of the world. And the battle having gone all against him, and he being wearied so that he could hardly stand, Roland blew a great blast which resounded for many miles and faintly reached the ears of Charlemagne as he sat in his hall at Aachen. "Listen! the horn of Roland!" he cried. But Ganelon urged that it was the wind in the trees. Again Roland sounded a loud blast, exerting so much strength that the blood gushed from his eyes and his temples; and again the distant Emperor heard the sound, and this time more distinctly. "Surely," he exclaimed, "that is Roland's horn? He is in battle and in need." But Ganelon pretended that if it were really the horn, it was merely that Roland was hunting and blew it for joy and gladness; and he artfully continued, "Roland is too proud to sound his horn in battle. My Lord the Emperor allows himself to be easily startled."

At last, and for a third time, Roland gathered together his strength and sounded his horn yet again, so that the blast reached the ears of Charlemagne, leaving no room for doubt. And he sprang from his seat, crying,

“O Roland, my brave knight, thou art in need! Too long have I delayed! Quick, quick! To arms!” Then he set out at full-speed with his gallant warriors to meet Roland and Oliver and the rearguard; but before he could reach Roncesvalles, Oliver had fallen, mortally wounded. Roland essayed to wind his horn yet once more, and the faint sound was carried down the wind to the Emperor as he drew near, so that he said to his captains, “Good barons, yonder is Roland’s horn sighing. Truly he is in great distress!” and the trumpeters blew loudly the signal to quicken the march. Then the ringing of spears and the tramp of feet and the shrill clarions so rolled and echoed amongst the mountains, that the Paynim host heard and hastened to slay the undaunted Roland, if that might be, before the Emperor’s army was upon them. And many of the heathen knights, standing far off, flung their spears at the champion as he sank from his horse. The spirited Vegliantino fell, pierced with many wounds, and Roland’s armour was everywhere dented, and he lay as one dead.

The aged Archbishop Turpin was also sore wounded, and he painfully dragged himself towards the Count, and said, “Dear Roland, thank God the field is thine and mine. We have fought a good fight.” Then Roland lay down with his face towards Spain and his sword and his horn beside him, and there the Emperor found him, and fell on his face with a loud and bitter cry. All night he wept and moaned for his brave young captain, while his troops rested and slept. Then, with morning light, leaving four nobles to watch beside the dead, Charlemagne led his army on over the pass in full chase of the Paynim troops; and when he overtook them he wrought upon them a complete destruction for their treachery and their evil victory.

But always he mourned for Roland, and his heart was



THE BATTLE OF RONCESVALLES





very heavy as he set off to return to France. He would murmur a lamentation which reminds us of that of his ideal King David : " O Roland, my friend, my friend ; would God I had died for thee ! " And because Ganelon had wilfully set himself to betray his fellow-warriors, Charlemagne caused him to be put to death with the cruel death of a criminal. His name became a by-word for treachery, and he is referred to with scorn and contempt in all the " heroic " literature. We find him mentioned in Chaucer's " Monk's Tale " and " Nonne Prieste's Tale." Dante places him in the Ninth Circle of Hell, the place of Traitors.

Then the Emperor grew aged, and white of hair and beard, and saw with sorrow one after another of his young sons fall sick and die ; until only the fair, delicate Louis was left. He was a gentle lad and right of heart, but in no way fitted to control the turbulent Empire which should be his. Of the long tale of wonder recording the great deeds of Charlemagne and his paladins, the fragment giving the battle of Roncesvalles was the best known and the most beloved. It was sung in every castle-hall, told around every camp-fire ; whispered in ladies' bowers ; penned by monks in their silent cloisters ; and everywhere was powerful to stir the hearts of men and women to achieve and to endure. Taillefer, the favourite minstrel of Duke William of Normandy, is said to have sung it as he rode in the invading army at Senlac.

Because Charlemagne was a great Christian ruler, and because he fought to subdue the infidels, Dante in his Vision places him in the company of the mighty Hebrew leaders, Joshua and Judas Maccabæus, and there makes him a link between those heroes of antiquity and the great crusaders, William of Provence and Guiscard, of the tenth century.

## XIX

### The Story of Romèo

1160-1230

“ Within the pearl that now encloseth us  
Shines Romèo’s light, whose goodly deed and fair  
Met ill acceptance.”

*Paradiso vi.*

**L**ITTLE is known of the early years of Romèo di Villeneuve; he was one of the many fervent and adventurous spirits of the Middle Ages who devoted themselves to pious travel, and hid their identity beneath the Pilgrim’s gown. They often hid their names, too, under the guise of the humble “Palmer,” or “Romer,” from the latter of which the name Romèo is supposed to come. Lovers of Scott will recall the delightful sense of mystery in *Marmion* at the entrance of the Palmer in Canto I., although no doubt the experienced story-reader penetrated his disguise.

The three forms of activity, journeying to various holy sites, to Palestine, and to Rome, sprang from the same devotional and daring idea. For, in the Middle Ages, travel was an experience to be prayed against, as in the Litany in the Book of Common Prayer; hence only those whose religious fervour was high, or physical courage and endurance great, gave themselves up to such

a way of life. There was, however, a real distinction between the three kinds of pilgrims ; and to have been ignorant of this would have been as impossible to an observer in those days as to-day it would be not to know the difference between a cab and a carriage. The Pilgrim was one who undertook, perhaps only once in his life, a journey to the Holy Land, or to some sacred shrine in Europe, in fulfilment of a vow. The word *Pilgrim*, from *peregrinus*, shows the mode of journeying. The Palmer was he who went beyond seas and travelled in the East from the holy places of Palestine to the various sacred shrines in Asia, and spent his whole life in thus doing. A spray of palm worn in the hood was the proudly-humble token of the palmer. The long list of places supposed to have been visited by the mysterious visitor to Norham Castle shows how little distance and difficulty stood in the way of such journeys :—

“ Here is a holy Palmer come,  
From Salem first and then from Rome ;  
One that hath kissed the Blessed Tomb,  
And visited each holy shrine  
In Araby and Palestine ;  
On hills of Armenie hath been  
Where Noah’s ark may yet be seen ;  
By that Red Sea, too, hath he trod  
Which parted at the prophet’s rod ;  
In Sinai’s wilderness he saw  
The Mount, where Israel heard the law,  
’Mid thunder-dint and flashing levin  
And shadows, mists and darkness, given :  
He shows St James’s cockle-shell ;  
Of fair Montserrat, too, can tell,  
And of that grot where olives nod,  
Where, darling of each heart and eye,  
From all the youth of Sicily,  
Saint Rosalie retired to God.

To stout Saint George of Norwich merry  
Saint Thomas, too, of Canterbury,  
Cuthbert of Durham and Saint Bede  
For his sins' pardon hath he prayed,  
He knows the passes of the North  
And seeks far shrines beyond the Forth. . . ."

Dante, in his *Vita Nuova*, in describing a great pilgrimage to Rome in the year 1301, adds a gloss, or description, of the three terms used: "I wrote this sonnet which beginneth, 'Ye pilgrim-folk,' and made use of the word *pilgrim* in its general significance. The word *pilgrim* may be understood in two senses, one general and one special. General, so far as any man may be called a pilgrim who leaveth the place of his birth; whereas, more narrowly speaking, he only is a pilgrim who goeth towards or frowards the house of S. James. For there are three separate denominations proper unto those who undertake journeys to the glory of God. They are called Palmers who go beyond the seas eastward, whence often they bring palm-branches. And Pilgrims are they who journey unto the holy house of Galicia; seeing that no other apostle was buried so far from his birthplace as was the blessed S. James. And there is a third sort who are called Romers; in that they go, as I have said these folk went, to Rome."

We can imagine how piety, as well as kindly feeling, would lead to these travellers being received with hospitable welcome in hall and castle: how the stories of their adventures and perils and the wonders they had seen would be listened to eagerly. For, although there were Inns on the main roads of Europe, yet they were hardly enough for the ordinary travellers well-provided with money; and in seasons of pilgrimage, or in places near pilgrimage towns, such as Amiens,

Venice, Compostella, Rocamador in Guienne, Walsingham, Durham and Canterbury, the charitable had plenty of scope for helping those in need on their journeys. It became a custom for rich men, and monastic houses, to establish "hospitals," or hostels, for the entertainment of pilgrims. These humble dwellings usually stood near the entrance to the town, or at the end of a bridge, or beneath the shadow of a famous church. At Calais there was one of the earliest of these, called, in the pretty French phrase, a *Maison-Dieu*, "for the sustenance of the pilgrims and other poor folks repairing to the said town to rest and refresh them."

By the time of Chaucer the habit of going on pilgrimages had become a matter of fashion, as well as devotion. Travel was easier, roads safer, horses to be had on main highways, and altogether the enterprise was undertaken in a less serious and more light-hearted way. But away back in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with many kings at war with each other and rough soldiery moving about the Continent; with strong, quarrelsome barons behaving like petty kings in their own territories; and with all the parts of great forest lands inhabited by wild beasts, and undrained marshes to be crossed, a pilgrimage was a matter of endurance and courage.

One day in the year 1196, amongst the travellers arriving at the Court of the good Count Raymond of Provence was a tall, thin man, wearing the serge gown of the pilgrim and bearing staff and scrip. Grave was he in manner and quiet and courteous in speech; and though he sat meekly enough in the outer hall conversing pleasantly with those that stood near, yet, when he was sent for to the Count's panelled chamber, none wondered that he was kept there some long while in earnest talk. When after a night's rest most of the wayfarers again



took the road, and when, later, the travelling physician and his Moorish attendants had taken grateful leave, still the pilgrim stayed. Later in the day he was seen walking round the battlements of the castle, and thoughtfully gazing over the fair domains stretching beyond the moat. And again, in the evening, he sat attentive by the heavy oaken chair of Count Raymond on the dais, and when he spoke it was in measured tones. And men saw that he would now and then raise his hand as does a preacher ; and at times would take from the lining of his gown a set of ivory tablets, and thereon write something.

Then, when the Count gave audience to his forest-warden, his shepherd, his falconer, and the rest, the pilgrim stood near and his observant eyes noted these servants of Count Raymond ; and at times he would ask a sudden, shrewd question concerning the timber or the flocks or the mews. And the lord would now and again say to him, " It is not thus in thy land, said'st thou ? " Whereto the stranger sometimes replied, " I said not," and at other times, " Nay."

When all the toil and traffic of the day were over, and the Count sat in the great hall amongst his family and retainers, and the serfs who gathered there from their cots, near the great roaring fire upon the hearth ; then would the minstrels bring forth their viols and lutes and sing of war and love and gallant deeds. And the grave eyes of the strange pilgrim would shine as the singers told of Roland and Roncesvalles, and he would gently beat on his knee in time with the twanging chords of the players. Also he cared greatly to hear the verses of the troubadours, many of whom visited the Court of Count Raymond, as soon as the dark winter was ended. There was also one mostly in residence there, a certain

Gerault de Berneil, whose fame spread over Europe. He had travelled to England and sung before King Richard of the Lion-Heart, like his great rival, Arnould Daniel ; and so great was his fame that he was known as the "Master of the Troubadours." With him the pilgrim would hold much quiet converse ; and men said that both had travelled wherever it was worth while to go, one in the service of Song and the other in the service of Religion.

At the Court of Count Raymond every man of gifts might be sure of a welcome. A poet would be listened to courteously and sent on his way well-cheered, with charge to return soon ; a scholar was entertained in the upper Hall and lodged in the little turret chamber where stood a chest with (some said) nine precious books within ; a knight would have bed and board and shelter for his followers and his steeds, and all the stable villeins would turn out to escort him over the drawbridge. And even the poor wayfarers were sure of a meal in the outer court of the vast kitchen, where cooks prepared the food for two hundred people every day. The Count, himself, was something of a poet, and more than something of a warrior. But in his middle age he had few enemies, and his neighbours readily acknowledged his high birth and his great position. Even the firebrand baron, Bertrand de Born, refrained from casting gibes at the honourable and stately Count Raymond ; and it was said that he would have well liked it if his son Bertrand could have wedded one of the four daughters of the Berenger house.

In the year in which the pilgrim arrived the two elder daughters were of an age to marry, and their hands were sought by the elder sons of kings, as well as by subject-princes and great barons. But Count Raymond

hastened not to give away either ; for he pondered much upon how to govern his household and to act so that the fortunes of his house might be maintained. The ladies were wont to sit in the hall for their repast, and afterwards to retire to their bower, where, it was said, the Countess did much embroidery and tapestry, accomplishments in which she excelled. Her eldest daughter, the Lady Margaret, also spent much time with her needle, and both could design great pictures of warriors and hunting, and sketch out the scenes on their canvas. The two daughters next in age were less fond of this quiet employment, and spent as much time as they could in the great hall, or in the courtyard, ordering the falcons and the hounds, and sat near their father while he dealt with the cases which his steward laid before him. The youngest, Beatrice, was but a child, and, as her mother feared, somewhat of a hoyden. For she was daring and fearless like a boy ; and one day, tearing her finger on a hook so that it bled sorely, she wept not nor paled, but charged the chaplain's attendant, who was also the leech, to " bind it up without more ado so that it may heal." The Lady Beatrice often had storms of passion, when the nursery, where she abode with her nurse-attendant, resounded with stamps and shrieks and furious cries of anger. Then would the women seek out her father, and he would order the child to be brought to him as he arranged his weapons in the armoury, or kept his accounts in the turret, or pondered the maps and plans of his estate, so as to have here a new fish-pond, or there a drained sward for the great tournaments. Then would he look gravely at her and ask wherefore his ears had been hurt by a noise that belonged to a mad-house ? and wherefore a daughter should so distort her face with anger that it had become black like the sky before

thunder ? Whereto the maiden would answer nothing, but presently become composed and good, and seek some quiet corner where she might handle the pleasant things which lay about her father's place, but were not seen in the bower. Amongst these would be spurs, and hilts, and fragments of gay ribbon from lists ; and seals and leaves of parchment with tracery and characters thereon. And always upon the screen hung an illuminated page with beautiful gold and vermilion designs gleaming ; and, within a border where angels and cherubs played, were many lines of fair, even, square signs, some of which Beatrice began to know.

In the line near the bottom she could remember, when she was but ten years old, the name of the large gold-initialled word with P in a little square picture, "*Cum Spiritu Paraclito.*" While her sisters sat happily at their tambour frames, Beatrice uneasily roamed from window to stool, and was glad on the days when hunting-parties were made up, and all set forth on horses, and palfreys, and mules, to meet in some forest glade, where in the late afternoon the hunters would join them laden with spoils of the chase.

Days became weeks, and weeks passed into months, and still the pilgrim stayed with the Sieur de Berenger. Now he had discarded his worn travelling garb, and wore the dark gown of a cleric, and a close cap. An inkhorn hung from his girdle, and he was even more ready with his pen than the chaplain. For long hours he sat with the Count, and it was understood that he was entrusted with much private knowledge of the Berenger house and estates. Nevertheless, to none did he tell his own name and estate, unless to the Sieur Raymond himself, who said no word to others, and he was known as *Romèo*, a playful form of the familiar "Romer." And he had

given to him a turret chamber for his own, and he was served with respect as one near to the Count himself.

Presently it became known that among the suitors for the hand of the Lady Margaret was King Louis the VIII. of France, who desired her for his son Louis who should succeed him. But, as the treasury of the King was much exhausted, it was needed that the lady his son should marry should bring a great dowry with her, not only in lands and castles, but also in *louis d'or*. And after much debate with Romèò the Sieur Raymond gave his consent, and presented the Lady Margaret to the young Louis with much money. Soon afterwards the King died, and the lady became Queen Margaret of France, as the wife of Louis the Good. Then, since she filled her great post with much dignity and grace, and had, moreover, much wealth, the King of England, Henry III., known abroad as "the King of the simple life," desired that he might have her sister, the Lady Eleanor, in marriage. And after consultation with Romèò, who affected no surprise but declared that he expected this to happen, the Count gave his consent, and Henry fetched his bride to England. With her there came a large number of Provençal knights and attendants and their wives, and settled down in England, where they wondered much at the plenty of the land and the rough manners of the people. It was said that no English lady had used a comb for her hair until the fashion was set by Queen Eleanor and her ladies.

Then before long King Henry of England sent noble ambassadors to ask in marriage the hand of the Lady Costanza, Count Raymond's third daughter, for his brother, the King of the Romans; so she also became a Queen. And the Lady Beatrice, now grown up, had left off her hoydenish ways, and busied herself with ruling the castle and the maidens, and training her hawks and



hounds, for the Countess now rarely left her bower. During the celebrations of the festival that was kept for her sister's marriage, she presided at the Court of Love, in which troubadours from far and near contested for the prize and declaimed their verses. On this occasion Gerault de Berneil composed one of his brightest, daintiest poems, and entered the lists wearing the favours of the daughter of the house. He called it "A Song of the Morning," and it began thus :—

“ Companion dear ! or sleeping or awaking  
Sleep not again ! for lo ! the morn is nigh ;  
And in the east the early star is breaking,  
The day's forerunner, known unto mine eye ;  
The morn, the morn is near ! ”

During some of the quiet hours of the festivities, there was some solemn talk between the royal lover and the father of his bride ; and Count Raymond watched with interest the behaviour of the young brother Charles, who was acting as squire to the king. He was dark and strong and grave ; tall and well-made, but not handsome, for his nose was very large. He was not greatly amused by the music and singing and the buffoons ; and he took with somewhat ill grace the pleasantries of the Fool who disported himself as he would amongst the gay company. It was understood that he desired to get back to his wars, for he had hopes that he might depose the daring Manfred, who had succeeded to the kingdom of Sicily, and reign in his stead. The Lady Beatrice regarded him as some one unlike the Provençal barons and the gallant princes who had visited her father's court and she listened to her woman's description of the gallant deeds told of the dark-browed young prince by his retainers.

So that when a formal message came from the King of France that he desired the Count's daughter, Beatrice, to be betrothed to his youngest brother, Count Charles

of Anjou, the Sieur Raymond conferred with Romèò and listened readily to his arguments. "Give the Lady Beatrice to Count Charles," he said, "for thou shouldst let her have a brave man for her husband, and that will he be. He will be the best man in the world for her to wed, and good shall come of it." And so the marriage came about; and, when the bride's sister, Queen Eleanor of England, said to her, "Then thy husband is but a Count and no King," Beatrice replied, "And that he may be, but I will have him"; which, in after days, her sisters thought bore some meaning other than that which appeared.

With the four daughters married and gone, and the Countess soon after laid to her last long sleep in the white tomb beside the altar, Count Raymond became silent, and much absorbed in thought. For he was often lonely; his friends and neighbours seemed no longer friendly and courteous as before, but many shunned him. Then it came about that tales reached his ears of things which Romèò had advised having turned out ill, and especially of the management of the lands of Provence, whose revenues had to be used for the dowries of the Queens, his daughters. And one day, when he was depressed and sad, Count Raymond lamented to Romèò that he had done this and that, and questioned whether he would not have been wiser to have acted differently. Also he asked to have a fair and clear reckoning made out of Romèò's stewardship in all matters that he had not himself recorded.

Wherefore after gloomy and angered debate wherein none dared approach them, Romèò said to Count Raymond, "Sire, I have served thee a long time, and brought thee from low to high estate, and for this through false counsel of thy folk thou art little grateful. I came to thy court a poor pilgrim and have lived

modestly on thy bounty. Have my mule and my staff and scrip given back to me as when I came, and I ask no further wages." Then the Count bade him not so to withdraw, but Romèò refused to remain where he was doubted and distrusted, and "he departed, as he had come, none knew whither, nor did any man ever know his name." Soon the busy tongues that had wrought the mischief began to put it about that the Sieur of Berenger was bereft and at a loss, and that his mysterious helper had been a "sainted soul to whom he had shown himself ungrateful and churlish."

Dante, writing nearly a century after his time, so fully accepts the tradition of the saintliness of the unknown pilgrim that he shows him a companion spirit of the Emperor Justinian in the Heaven of Mercury, the Second Heaven, and the Emperor informs Dante that—

"This little star is furnished with good spirits  
Whose mortal lives were busied to that end,  
That honour and renown might wait on them. . . ."

and then follow the lines at the head of this chapter.

The ingratitude meted out to Romèò undoubtedly appealed to Dante, himself conscious of single-hearted efforts which were ill-requited. He goes on:—

"But the Provençals  
That were his foes have little cause for mirth.  
Ill shapes that man his course who makes his wrong  
Of other's worth. Four daughters were there born  
To Raymond Berenger, and every one  
Became a queen; and this for him did Romèò,  
Though of mean state and from a foreign land.  
Yet envious tongues incited him to ask  
A reckoning of that just one, who return'd  
Twelve-fold to him for ten. Aged and poor  
He parted thence: and if the world did know  
The heart he had, begging his life by morsels,  
'Twould deem the praise it yields him scantily dealt."

## XX

### Saint Dominic

1170-1221

“The loving minion of the Christian faith,  
The hallowed wrestler, gentle to his own,  
And to his enemies terrible.”

“Of Christian Faith, the athlete consecrate.”

*Paradiso xii.*

**I**N the year 1170, in the village of Callaroga, in Castile, the noble lady Joanna da Guzman prayed to God, like Hannah of old, for a son. Like Hannah of old, too, when God granted her prayer, she promised him to His service. Before he was born she dreamed that she saw him stand, strong and fearless, bearing a torch whose light lightened the whole world. And the lady Clara of Aza, who was asked to be the child's godmother, dreamed that she saw him with a gleaming star in his forehead and another on the crown of his head.

These two dreams, in an age when dreams were still felt to be channels of Divine communication, convinced Joanna and her husband, Felix da Guzman, that some great destiny lay before their child. So they decided to call him by a name which should show this in some way, and they chose Dominicas, “belonging to the Lord.” The boy, even when quite little, was different from most



DOMINIC AND THE MOORISH BANDITS





children. Many a time would his nurse find him out of bed, long after she had thought him asleep, kneeling on the nursery floor praying his little prayers to God.

One day, when he was about eight years old, a swarm of bees settled on his lips, and, finding him unhurt, his parents took it as a sign that he was to be gifted with eloquence. At fifteen he was sent to the public school at Palencia, and there learned Grammar (Latin), Logic and Rhetoric, and probably music in order to sing the services in the Cathedral. Then he went on to the University, and became one of its most famous students. Very early he found that of all subjects of learning, Theology was his favourite. At this time Castile and Aragon, afterwards to be united as Spain, were separate kingdoms, and Old Castile was famous for its great towns, its civilisation, learning and culture. Young Dominic da Guzman won distinction at the University, not only for his industry and ability, but also for a very unusual tenderness and large-heartedness.

Those were the days before fine buildings and luxurious surroundings for study ; and many of the students were very poor, often begging their way from one great seat of learning to another. One of the many stories told of Dominic's charity is that of his offering himself to be sold into captivity to the Moors. A poor woman begged of the students as they assembled in the porch of the Cathedral around their professor, saying that her son, himself a student, had been seized during a journey by Moorish bandits, and she was quite unable to pay the ransom demanded. The students gave, but the sum was far too little ; then Dominic stepped forward and offered to give himself. This was not permitted, however. At another time, when great want and suffering were in the city, through bad harvests, we find him selling his few

but most precious books, his desk and his pen, in order to give bread to the starving people.

He was an ardent student, and especially good in his favourite subject, Theology ; so that when only twenty-five years of age he was made a Canon of the Cathedral at Osma, and soon afterwards sub-prior of the convent. There his chief work was to teach students and to preach, and, like the eloquent S. Paul, his subject was "Christ and Him crucified."

In 1203 Dominic accompanied his Bishop on an Embassy to the court of Denmark. Passing through the South of France on their return the Bishop and his clergy interrupted their journey to preach a mission against heresy. The city of Albi, in the domain of the powerful Count of Toulouse, was the centre of a strong party of religious questioners ; and the King of Aragon, who was the Count's overlord, chose the occasion to doubt the loyalty of his suzerain. Political and religious difficulties led to a Crusade against the Count, led by the Count Simon de Montfort, the father of the famous Earl of Leicester, about whom we hear in connection with our English King Henry III. In the war many cruelties were committed, and much persecution practised in order to subdue the Albigensian heresy ; and Dominic and his Bishop gave themselves up to the more peaceful part of the work, that of preaching and teaching.

So impressed was the good Bishop of Osma with the need for teaching and for loving care of the people, so much neglected, that he obtained permission from the pope to resign his see, to give up his state and dignity, and to become a wandering missionary. He sent his clergy and attendants home, and, keeping Dominic with him, journeyed about on foot preaching the gospel. The example of this great man no doubt had much

effect upon the later resolve of Dominic. He saw a prince of the Church giving up his high position, and undertaking painful and arduous work in order to save souls, and gave himself up whole-heartedly to help in the task. The pope gave his blessing and proclaimed that "It is by preaching the truth that we can destroy error": so that Dominic became confirmed in his idea of greatly extending this form of Christian influence.

The monasteries by the beginning of the thirteenth century had lost much of their old usefulness. Their inmates dwelt secluded or served Cathedrals, and almost scorned the "secular" priests, as they were called, who lived amongst the people, caring for their parishes, and holding services in the little wooden churches. There were great scholars amongst the monks, and great statesmen, but the majority were absorbed in their quiet lives, and cared little for what went on in the world. Many of their houses, too, had become rich through gifts and bequests from penitent rich barons; and while the Abbots and Priors lived much as great noblemen, their inferiors often spent their lives in undignified idleness.

Dominic decided to establish a Society of Monks who should be bound together by the desire to give up their lives to hard work, and by the resolve to refrain from becoming rich and encumbered with lands and abbeys. They were to undergo strict training, live under stern discipline, and go about continually preaching Christ. So in 1215, the year in which the English barons were confronting King John at Runnymede, the Society was founded, which was to become one of the most wonderful religious bodies in Christendom. Desiring to avoid old titles and familiar things, Dominic called his associates Preaching Friars; and having obtained the sanction of the pope, he opened a small house at Bologna. This

was one of the most famous towns of Italy in the Middle Ages—free, independent, wealthy—and the seat of a great University famous for the study of Law.

Sixteen men were selected from the many enthusiasts who desired to join. They were men of different nationalities, two of them being English; but all united by the common language of learning, the Latin tongue. They were to live lives of self-denial; follow the Rule, or Way of Life, of S. Augustine; study as well as preach, and seek ever the glory of God and the spread of His Name. Their dress was to be a coarse serge gown, black in colour, with a leathern girdle; sandals on their feet; and a small wallet or scrip in which to carry a copy of one of the Gospels, or some religious treatise. In days to come they were to be known by a nickname given by the unlettered people amongst whom they worked, a name which became a term of honour, the Black Friars. Even to-day we are now and then reminded of these missionaries by street and place names in our old towns. On the Continent another nickname was more popular, a punning reference to their founder and their activity: *Domini Canes*, “the watchdogs of the Lord.”

Very proud was the old French city of Carcassone in later years, since amongst its records there were more than once the signatures of Dominic and of great members of his order. Presently so many men and women desired to join that there were three grades of members: those who undertook to give up their whole lives to study and preaching; women who would give themselves up to prayer and helping the poor; and a Third Order of men willing to fight for the Church. These were known as the *Militia Christi*, and in the troublous times of war between different towns and their



leaders, these soldier-monks would guard the Cathedrals and Churches.

Dominic, as years went on, gave himself no rest. Travelling from one convent to another—organising, preaching, studying—his example kept his followers in a state of high enthusiasm. Not content with having all Europe for his mission-field, he planned a journey to Africa. A chronicler of the time writes, "He preached by night and by day, in houses, in fields, and by the roadside." Many wonderful occurrences became connected with him. His personal holiness, courage and devotion led people to think his power miraculous. Stories are told of how he preached to a famished population, and moving them to penitence promised rain. Before his sermon was ended the long-wished-for showers came. An insolent councillor ridiculed his work and spoke evil of him. Dominic meeting him said, with steady gaze, "Thou goest to meet thy God. Prepare," and the man was shortly afterwards taken ill and died.

The rivalry which threatened discord between his Order and the Franciscan was checked by his willingness to be friend and servant to Francis. In a dream Dominic saw the figure of Christ bearing arrows with which He was about to punish the world for its wickedness. His blessed Mother approached Him, and led with her two men whose desire it was to convert all people, and in his dream Dominic recognised himself and Francis of Assisi. Acting upon his dream he approached the other saintly leader, and proposed, "You are my comrade; let us go together and nothing can prevail against us." In sign whereof they exchanged girdles. The large-heartedness of the leaders, however, did not prevent the existence of a jealous rivalry between the followers of each.

Dante expresses the generous spirit which animated the best minds when he makes, in his Vision of them in Paradise, a Franciscan monk proclaim a glowing eulogy of Dominic, and a Dominican similarly praise Francis. In later years this spirit was perpetuated by the custom of having a Franciscan preach in a Dominican Church on its Founder's Day, and a Dominican preach in a Franciscan Church on its similar festival.

Probably the energetic, masterful character of Dominic was influenced towards gentleness by the compelling influence of the loving Francis. The story is told of how when both were at Cremona, labouring, Dominic had thought Francis unwise in not taking more active measures for the relief of the poor amongst whom they toiled. But the example of the ardent pleader for their souls so touched the townspeople far and near that they sent ample supplies unasked. Dominic acknowledged, "Of a truth God hath especial care of these holy poor little ones, *and I knew it not*. Wherefore I promise from henceforth to observe the holy gospel Poverty." So, in the amended statutes of the Order, the Dominicans were from henceforward to own no property, and to depend upon charity for necessary food.

In the year 1221 this eager, unresting worker might have been seen in the early days of a hot August walking along the winding road amongst the hills from Venice to Bologna. Thinking deeply, here and there stopping wayfarers to reason with or comfort them; here and there preaching to the rustic people of the hamlets, but hurrying, always hurrying forward. When he reached Bologna he sank exhausted upon the floor of the convent, and warned the startled brothers that his time had come. They implored him to let them place his tired, fevered body upon a bed, but he refused. "Let me lie upon the

ground," he said, "that is indeed a worthy enough resting-place for my worn-out body." His whole mind ran on the future work of the community, and with almost his last breath he said, "Have charity ; guard humility ; make your treasure out of voluntary poverty." The troubled Brethren, seeing him grow weaker, carried him up the vine-clad slopes of a hill outside the city, that the purer air might revive him. But it was too late, and Dominic had no desire to live now that strength to carry on his great work had failed him. His last request was to be buried in the convent ground ; his grave just one beside others. As a last exercise in humble poverty, when they removed the torn and travel-stained gown in which he had journeyed, he asked to borrow another from one of his companions so that he might indeed realise that he had nothing of his own. To the Brethren's pleas that they might lay his bones beneath the altar, he replied, "God forbid that I should be buried anywhere save under the feet of my brethren." And so, peacefully, he died.

However lowly the place of burial none could prevent the devout honour paid to his memory in the funeral services. Cardinal Ugolini, Bishop of Ostia, was present, and wrote the epitaph which was placed on a tablet in the convent church of S. Nicholas, in Bologna.

"The venerable servant of God, Dominic da Guzman, founder of the Order of Friars Preachers. He slept in our Lord at noon on Friday, Aug. 6, 1221. May the name of the Lord be praised for ever."

It would have been against all the pious instincts of his Brethren to place words of fulsome praise upon his tomb. Dante, writing nearly ninety years later, reproduces in the words of S. Buonaventura, whom he meets

in the heaven of the sun, panegyrics which many preachers had pronounced upon him.

“ He grew

Mighty in learning ; and did set himself  
To go about the vineyard that soon turns  
To wan and withered if not tended well :

. . . . .

Then with sage doctrine and good will to help  
Forth on his great apostleship he fared,  
Like torrent bursting from a lofty vein.”

## XXI

### Saint Francis of Assisi

1182-1226

“ He had, through thirst of martyrdom, stood up  
In the proud Soldan's presence, and there preached  
Christ and His followers ; but found the race  
Unripen'd for conversion : back once more  
He hasted (not to intermit his toil)  
And reap'd Ausonian lands. . . .”

*Paradiso xi.*

**I**N beautiful Umbria, on the lower slopes of the Apennines, stands the town of Assisi (I have ascended), famous as the birthplace of S. Francis. In the year 1182, a certain Pietro Bernardone and his wife had a son born to them. They were well-to-do people, holding a good position in Assisi, dealing in cloth and woollen fabrics. They named their little son John ; but his father's frequent journeys to France on business led him to teach the boy French words as soon as he could speak, and the child learnt them so readily that his Father changed his name to Francis. Pietro Bernardone seems to have been a man of a gay and cheerful disposition, which little John inherited. He was ever to be heard singing about his mother's knees ; and later, as he roamed the sunny hillsides, he chanted the Troubadour songs of which his father was fond. As he grew older he went to the convent school, and was



taught the Latin Grammar and the music of the Church services.

When he was about eighteen years of age he joined his father in business, and became expert in judging the textures and colours of cloth, and pleasantly able to drive a good bargain with the merchants, or to induce the thrifty townswoman to buy for her household. In his leisure hours he seems to have joined in the amusements of the young nobles of the town, where his gay songs, attractive manners, and open purse made him welcome. In that age, and especially in France and Italy, there was a great outburst of romantic feeling; and youths unable to go on high adventure set themselves the task of composing verses about chivalrous heroes. Then, instead of writing books quietly at home, or singing privately in their own houses, they would form themselves into small bands and patrol the streets, singing and reciting in the courtyards of palaces and the open spaces of the market place.

Francis Bernardone was not, however, merely a stay-at-home merchant's son. When Assisi was at feud with the city of Perugia, he joined a regiment in defence of his home, and was taken prisoner during the war. For a year he was imprisoned in the fortress of Perugia. When released he returned home, and hastened to join a band of volunteers who were going to fight for the Pope against the Emperor.

At this time he seems to have intended to be a soldier all his life, and especially to join in the Crusades. But he took a fever during the marches and sieges, and when he recovered was no longer able to follow so adventurous a life. He travelled about, to Rome amongst other places, where he was grieved to see how small and poor were the offerings made to the Church. In a spirit of

generous enthusiasm he emptied his purse into the bowl and was left penniless, a stranger in the city. This seems to have been his first experiment with poverty, and soon he carried it further. He exchanged garments with a beggar sitting on the Cathedral steps, that he might make acquaintance with the position of outcast, and learn to realise what utter dependence meant.

Then he compelled himself to help and to visit the poor afflicted lepers, who were at that time to be found in every city, dreaded and shunned. Wrapped in grey garments with their faces concealed, these unhappy sufferers were required to carry a rattle and sound it as they walked to warn people to get out of their way. By degrees it became borne in upon the mind of Francis that a life of service and of poverty must be his. Kneeling in the Church of S. Damiano he had a vision, in which the figure of the crucified Christ seemed to accept his vow to give up his life to God. This resolution greatly grieved his prosperous, genial father, who could not understand why any one should seek discomfort, and he took an angry farewell of him.

Clothed in poor garments and without money, Francis walked along the roads of Assisi with joy in his heart. Presently he asked permission to help in repairing a ruined church, and obtaining food by this means he then sought out churches needing this kind of work. A very ancient building in Assisi, which had once been served by S. Benedict, was falling into ruins, and this Francis determined to rebuild. Tradition said that angels had sang in the roof in the days of S. Benedict, six centuries before, so that it was sometimes known as the Church of S. Maria degli Angeli.

After some years spent in this way there came to him a more definite guidance from heaven as to his

future life; and during Divine Service one day he seemed to hear Christ charging him to go about the world and preach to the poor, tend the sick, and go unencumbered with money, or scrip, or staff, or shoes. So he abandoned even these last, and wearing the coarse, single garment of the poorest Umbrian peasants, secured about his waist by a hempen cord, he set off on his great missionary journey. He had always been of a loving and tender disposition, gay of heart, and able to find pleasure in simple things; and now, with this new happiness possessing him, he trod the earth, barefoot, with joyous freedom. So wrapped up was he in the consciousness of Divine Love that it transfigured his face, and gave deep tones of tenderness to his voice. When he accosted some person and spoke of the Love of God, his hearer would often turn and follow him, begging to be allowed to accompany him whithersoever he was going. Moved by his example and behaviour, a rich man of Assisi sold everything that he possessed, gave the money to the poor, and joined Francis. Soon, a Canon of the Cathedral resigned his position and did the same. But at this time the young man had no idea of forming a band of followers; so that as many as came to him he blest them, and sent them away, "two and two," to preach and teach and serve, as Christ sent his disciples. As time went on, however, it became necessary to have some appointed meeting-place, some centre; and then Francis journeyed to Rome again; this time to gain the sanction of the Pope for a community living under special vows.

The story goes that when Francis and his companions approached the Lateran palace the Pope, believing them to be merely beggars, refused an audience. That night he had a dream: the fine Church of S. John tottered, and



S FRANCIS OF ASSISI TENDING LEPROUS





was about to fall when the leading "beggar" of the morning supported it, and held it firm. The Bishop of Assisi asked him to grant an audience to the missionaries, and he gladly commanded them to his presence, and sanctioned the little Society's plans and work. Giotto shows this striking interview in one of his frescoes, and also represents in another Francis espousing his bride, Poverty.

On returning to Assisi with his band of Brothers "minores," as he was careful to say, he set himself to every kind of work of mercy in his native town. Lest he and his helpers should become proud or spiritually arrogant towards the ignorant, Francis discouraged study and elaborate preaching, and desired the Brothers to be simple and plain in their discourses. He himself continually dwelt on the Love of God, and sought to awaken love in other hearts. In taking Poverty for his bride he saw all the poor, small, and mean things of earth in a new light. Nothing could be despised or overlooked; everything made some claim upon the tenderness of his feelings. He has been called "a Minnesinger of Divine Love"; for his boyish fondness for song and gaiety found expression in little canticles of love and praise to God, which he and his companions sang as they trod the Umbrian roads. When they reached a town they would seek out some humble tasks, carrying water, selling wood, weaving baskets, and always tending the unhappy lepers and the sick outcasts.

With this joyful simplicity of life they practised profound humility. Any of the monks "maiores," the clergy or the readers whom they might meet, they greeted by kissing their hands. In every way they sought to despise self and to do honour to others. As the years passed, men flocked more and more to take the vow of

poverty, until there were a thousand members. Women, too, desired to give themselves up in the same absolute way. Amongst them was the lady Clara, a daughter of one of the noble houses of Assisi, and after some time she became the head of a community of women attached to the Church of S. Damiano, and devoted to good works and to poverty. They were to nurse the sick, tend the poor, and do fine embroidery for the vestments and hangings of the Church. The "Poor Ladies of S. Damiano" afterwards became known as the "Poor Clares," and their work in Assisi was only the beginning of a long record of saintly service.

Also, as in the case of the Dominicans, it was found desirable to have a Third Order, consisting of men living in the world and doing their ordinary work, but vowed to especial purity of life and to the practice of unselfish acts of love. It is believed that Dante was a member of this Third Order of S. Francis; and the Church of Santa Maria at Ravenna, where he was buried, was a Franciscan Church. As the years passed and Francis grew old, he became even more, rather than less, devoted to poverty. By means of it he believed that men and women might acquire the virtues and graces of holiness; and in it, he felt, there was to be found the purest joy. When a young member of the community once asked to be allowed to have a psalter, he rebuked him, saying, "When you have a psalter you will wish to have a breviary, and when you have a breviary you will sit in a chair like a great prelate, and will say to your brother, 'Brother, fetch me my breviary.'" Yet there was no gloomy harshness in the life of self-denial. He truly went "on his way rejoicing." Many years after his death there was found a treasured copy of the little canticles sung by him and his companions:—

"Praised be my Lord God with all His creatures, and specially our brother the sun, who brings us the day and brings us the light: fair is he, and shines with a very great splendour.

Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars which He has set clear and lovely in heaven.

Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather. . . ."

Thus the singer gathers into his embrace all things, and finally praises God for "our sister death, the death of the body."

We read that once he was sought in the quiet recesses of a wood by a great churchman who had been attracted by what he had heard of the new Teacher of Assisi. He saw Francis coming to meet him, ragged, worn, emaciated, and exclaimed:—

"To thee? To *thee*? Why do they come to thee?"

"What say you?" asked the Friar.

"Why does the world run after thee? Thou art not noble, nor learned, nor handsome. Why?" The story does not give us the reply made by Francis, but the life he lived was answer enough to any questioner. "That man is very very strong and powerful, who looks not to be loved, nor to be admired, nor to have any honour or dignity, nor to have gratitude shown him; but whose sole thought is for others, and who lives only for them."

When, as sometimes happened, Francis was present at the tables of prelates and abbots, while talking kindly, gaily, he would be eating nothing, drinking sparingly of water, dipping his bread in the ashes on the hearth. If any wonderingly remonstrated he would say, "Brother, ash is pure"; and the self-indulgent great ones would see that this man had learned to care nothing for the pleasures of the senses. In 1219 Francis journeyed to Egypt to convert the Sultan, the most dreaded personage of the time, and pleaded with him in his camp

at Damietta. But the Friar's burning words concerning Christ and His Passion had no effect on the impassive Moslem, so that he ventured to propose another way of convincing him. He offered to walk through the fire (after the old manner of ordeals) in company with one of the Sultan's subjects who believed firmly in his religion; then the one who should emerge safely must be granted to hold the truer faith. But the challenge was not accepted, and Francis returned to his convent. The hardships of the journey and the condition of his poor neglected body brought about a sickness, which only the touching with a red-hot iron could cure. As the surgeon approached the suffering Friar murmured, "O brother Fire, the Most High hath created thee of exceeding comeliness, beautiful, useful; in this my hour, be thou courteous, merciful to me"; and when the operation was over he assured his friends that he had felt no pain.

But soon the poor tired body was unable to toil longer, and he had to be borne back to Assisi in a litter carried by his loving Brothers. As the little procession wound along the stony track round the hillside, and Assisi came in sight, Francis asked for the litter to be set down that he might take a last look at his beloved city. "Blessed be thou of God, O holy city," he cried; and he was borne along to the convent hospital. There as he grew worse and more feeble, he refused all comforts, and insisted that he should be laid upon the bare ground, in his tattered garment, and there wrestle with his bodily weakness. The watching Friars noticed that as evening drew on, and the sun sank to rest, and stillness crept over the land, the larks still flew and sang above the little hut where the saint lay dying.

With tender farewell words to his Brothers, Francis,



the man of love, passed away. He had asked that his body might be buried in the plot of ground outside the city where condemned criminals lay, but neither the sorrowing Friars nor the authorities of the Church paid heed to the request. The long funeral procession of Friars, and clergy, and canons, and monks, and weeping townspeople, and ragged beggars, and far behind the slinking figures of two or three lepers, wound from the Convent of the Portiuncula through the narrow, roughly paved streets of Assisi to the Church of S. George, passing on the way the humble abode of the Poor Clares, and with words of love and humble faith the body of Francis was laid in its last resting-place.

Very true had been the dream of the Pope that the humble beggar had supported the tottering Church. For the great awakening of love had done much to check the self-seeking spirit which had crept into the Christian Church, and had aroused numberless men and women to devotion. This was so fully acknowledged that the meek Brother was canonised two years later, and as S. Francis of Assisi his name is handed down the ages. His example and the beautiful devotion of his life have moved thousands to devotion; but also, in unworthy hearts, there grew up the notion that a life of selfishness might be atoned for at death by putting on the Franciscan habit of coarse serge. Dante refers to this in the *Inferno* when he shows us Count Guido de Montefeltro amongst those punished for giving evil counsels. The Count at death had donned the Franciscan gown and hempen girdle, but vainly;

“Believing thus begirt to make amends”;

for the black Cherubim regarded not the claim on S. Francis, and insisted:—



"He must come down among my servitors  
Because he gave the fraudulent advice."

Dante also refers to the mysterious experience which S. Francis was believed to have shared with some other saints of eminent devotion. His continual meditation upon the love of Christ and His Passion and Death brought about in his own body marks similar to those of the Crucified Lord. The prints of nails showed as barely healed wounds upon hands and feet, and the thorn-marks on the brow and the spear dint in the side, stood as perpetual symbols of his absorbing thought.

"On the hard rock  
'Twixt Arno and the Tiber, he from Christ  
Took the last signet, which his limbs two years  
Did carry. Then the season came that He,  
Who to such good had destined him, was pleas'd  
To advance him to the meed which he had earn'd  
By his self-humbling."

## XXII

### Albertus Magnus

1193-1280

"Thus heard I one who spake . . .  
'Thou fain wouldst hear what plants are these that bloom  
In the bright garland. . . .  
He nearest on my right hand brother was  
And master to me: Albert of Cologne. . . .'"

*Paradiso x.*

**A**LBERTUS VON BOLLSTÄDT was born in a town in Swabia towards the end of the twelfth century. The great Emperor Frederick Barbarossa had been dead three years, and his son and successor Henry the Sixth sat on the Imperial throne. At this time Italy and Germany were united in what was called the Holy Roman Empire; but the Lombard cities of Italy were strong and independent, and under their own dukes often resisted the power of the Emperor. For a hundred years the Emperors belonged to the great Swabian house of the Hohenstauffen; and it was through the struggle between these Emperors and the Popes that the rival parties of Ghibellines and Guelfs grew up.

The Swabian Emperors were enlightened rulers and encouraged the growth of German towns, granting favours and privileges to them through their counts or

dukes, so that in days to come they joined together as the old towns of Greece had done, to protect their liberties, and control their trade.

The town of Laningen is famous only as the birth-place of Albertus, one of the greatest scholars of the Middle Ages. It was during the twelfth century that the revival of learning led to the founding of Universities or Colleges for the study of All Learning. Some of them grew out of the schools attached to cathedrals or monasteries ; and at the time when Albertus was a lad, two of the most famous Universities were those of Paris and Padua, and Bologna and Oxford were rising to honour. We must, however, think of " Universities " not at all as collections of stately buildings, with lecture-halls and cloisters and gowned professors and resident students ; but as the temporary abodes of some eminent teacher or teachers, who travelled thither and announced their desire to lecture upon some branch of learning. Then the scholars would follow their instructor to some retired place : a large porch or an inn-yard, a quiet cloister or a deserted market, and there the lecture would be delivered. There is still to be seen in Paris a narrow street under the shadow of the Cathedral of Notre Dame, stone-paved and with a rough pavement on only one side, called the Rue du Fouarre, or Straw Street. The name recalls the distant days of the mediæval University, where Anselm and Abelard taught, and Becket and Albertus studied ; with dry straw from the market near by strewn for warmth and comfort on the rough stones, the teacher mounted on a threshold and the learners clustered round.

The language spoken at all the universities, whether Paris or Bologna or Oxford or Padua, was Latin, for, as yet, the various dialects spoken by the people in France,

Italy and England, had no written Literature. Thus, students of all nationalities understood each other ; though we find that wherever a large number of foreigners attended, there was some regulation by which they assembled more or less according to their countries, and were known as different " nations." It was the custom, too, to travel from one University to another, each being famous for excellence in one or more subjects. That of Paris was distinguished for Logic, Bologna for Law, Oxford for Theology. What books there were, were in manuscript ; very precious, cumbrous and expensive ; so that the study was largely carried on by means of discussions, or disputations.

We may picture this Swabian youth leaving his father's square, turreted house, about the year 1210, attended by a servant, and travelling in a party of knights and merchants, by the well-guarded military road down to Padua ; there lodging in one of the many students' inns, and joining the crowd of eager learners as they sought the different teachers in the byways and quiet spaces of the city. The famous Arabian scholar, Averrhoës, had taught at Padua, but had died a few years before this time. His subject and methods of study were the principal ones in esteem there, and thus young Albertus made acquaintance with the works of Aristotle, the " Master of them that know," which Averrhoës had translated into Latin.

Then he went on to Paris, and studied Logic, Geometry, and Natural Philosophy. For this last-named subject, and for what afterwards became Natural Science, Albertus had great fondness. It is thought that the mathematical lecturer of the time at Paris was his illustrious countryman, Jordanus de Saxonia. This scholar had studied at Cordova, and brought to Paris the knowledge of the Arabic Notation and the early parts

of Algebra. Under him, too, the students considered some of Aristotle's illustrations of Mechanics: the principle of the lever, the movements of bodies, and the unanswered questions, Why a thing in motion should ever stop? and, Why a chariot goes more easily on large wheels than on small ones?

Another great mathematician of the time was Leonardo da Pisa, and perhaps the University of Paris had in its Library a copy of his "*Liber Abaci*," or Book of Counting, in which the beautiful Arabic system of numeration and notation was explained. The scarcity of books and the expense of writing materials made the study of science very difficult, and, in the case of some branches, the absence of instruments, even of graduated rulers and compasses, balances, correct weights, and of all the handy, delicate tools which we find in a laboratory now, made progress very slow. Besides this, the investigation of the nature of substances, or Chemistry, was believed to be connected with Magic; and the study was discouraged at Paris both in Albertus' day, and later, when Roger Bacon studied there.

At this time the great religious movement begun by Dominic and Francis was making itself felt. Their followers were to be found amongst all ranks and classes of men, and especially at the Universities. There the Friars eagerly studied, and disputed upon the philosophy of Aristotle, which Christian thinkers had hitherto shunned. While the Franciscan Orders were intended rather for men prepared to give up everything and to devote themselves to works of mercy, the Dominicans aimed at reforming the world of thought. Thus they not only had specially-trained preachers, able to support the Christian faith by argument, but also they endeavoured to gather all that was good in the great pre-Christian learning. The Christian thinkers had by this time



become absorbed in difficult points of doctrine, and the Church frowned upon the study of philosophy as leading to heresy.

We are sure that a man so eager after learning would desire to know all that could be known, and that the enthusiasm of the new religious feeling would be sure to touch such an ardent mind. So that we are prepared to hear that Albertus, after he had studied for some years at Paris, joined the Order of Dominicans, and placed his talents and his life at the disposal of the Society. He was first sent to Cologne to spend a quiet time in a monastery there, and afterwards appointed to lecture in the convent schools throughout Germany. But his superiors required him to give up his study of Natural Science, on account of its dangerous likeness to Magic and the Black Art. This led him to a still more resolute devotion to the writings of Aristotle, who cared for Science only as a means to help correct thinking, and not for the sake of the convenient inventions that might come of it. In that age of nicknames one soon became attached to him. Scoffers called him the "Ape of Aristotle," but a more honourable title clings still to his name. Those who recognised how wide and how thorough was his knowledge called him the "Universal Doctor," and even during his life he was spoken of by the name by which he is known in history, Albertus Magnus. It is worth while remembering that he is one of the few men who have been called "Great" for other and more peaceful reasons than that of winning many battles or ruling over great territories.

After some years' teaching at Cologne, where he had one pupil who became even more distinguished than himself, he was made Grand Provincial of the Dominicans in Germany. Then, as the Pope and his ministers saw the good work done by this Order, he had an honour

bestowed upon him at Rome. He was made Grand Master of the Palace; and in this position had many opportunities of pleading the cause of the Dominicans who were undertaking missionary work in every part of the world, and strengthening the position of the Church by their able preaching and devotion.

Presently Albertus was made Bishop of Ratisbon, a town famous in later history for other reasons than that of possessing a most wonderful scholar as its bishop. After nearly twenty years' hard work in his diocese, he gave up the great position, and, like so many men of his time, retired to a convent to spend his last days in meditation and quiet. So in the peaceful cloisters at Cologne we may picture him in a tiny cell fitted with a desk attached to the wall and a high stool, sitting in his black frock and leathern girdle, his figure bent, writing busily, in beautiful even script, the long treatises which he left behind him. Twenty-one great books of large pages, heavily bound, were penned by him in his retreat in order that some of the learning he had gathered and uttered by word of mouth, during his long and strenuous life, should be preserved.

We should think those books a strange mixture could we read them now. Written in Latin, but in the careless mediæval Latin of Christendom, not the clear, pure tongue of Cicero; and discussing theology and philosophy and metaphysics and natural history. One of the volumes is devoted to pointing out the errors of the teaching of the great Arabian scholar, Averrhoës, in whose translation of Aristotle, Albertus had first become acquainted with the philosophy of his revered master.

Dante pays great honour to the memory of this famous German scholar, who died when he himself was a lad of fifteen, and was just beginning his more advanced studies under Ser Brunetto Latini. Like Albertus,

Dante loved learning and spoke of Philosophy as a knight might speak of his lady ; so that he had especial reverence for those who devoted their lives and their gifts to its service.

He shows us the illustrious spirits who dwell in the Fourth Heaven, the Heaven of the Sun ; and so intent upon his task is he, and so absorbed in his desire, that the leader may grasp his description that he interrupts himself to say,

“ Now rest thee, reader ! on this bench and muse  
Anticipative of the feast to come :  
So shall delight make thee not feel thy toil.”

Then he goes on to describe how, encircling Beatrice and himself like a wreath, was a ring of Twelve blessed spirits, the souls of devout scholars. Amongst them are Solomon the Wise, the famous King of Israel and Judah ; Dionysius, the Areopagite, a professor of Philosophy at Athens, who was converted by the preaching of S. Paul and became his disciple ; Boëthius, the last of the Roman philosophers ;<sup>1</sup> the Venerable Bede of England, and other saintly men. Amongst them was the favourite pupil of Albertus Magnus, the learned Thomas Aquinas, known as the “ Angelic Doctor.” He is described as explaining to Dante the presences in the mysterious ring ; and, himself a Dominican, pronouncing the eulogy upon S. Francis of Assisi, the twelfth glowing light in the circle. Dante ends his Book of the Paradiso with this vision of the blessed spirits who abide in the Light of God, but cannot interpret all that he is vouchsafed to perceive : “ To the high fantasy here power failed ; but already my desire and will were rolled—even as a wheel which moveth equally—by the Love that moves the sun and the other stars.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ch. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> Dent's “ Temple Classics ” Dante : Mr Wicksteed's translation.

## Conclusion

"The three kingdoms, *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*, look out on one another like compartments of a great edifice, a great supernatural world-cathedral, piled up there, stern, solemn, awful : Dante's World of Souls."

CARLYLE : *The Hero as Poet*.

THE action of the Divine Comedy, which reveals to us this World of Souls, covers a period of one week. The supposed date is March 24th, the eve of Good Friday, to April 1st, in the year 1300. Dante, in his letter of dedication to Can Grande, says that the purpose of the Comedy is "to remove those living in this life from the state of misery and lead them to the state of felicity." Thus, in virtue of its subject, its aim, and its felicitous treatment, it stands as one of the greatest epic poems of all time.

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